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Making Histories: The Exhibition of Postwar Art and the Interpretation of the Past in Divided Germany, 1950-1959

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Making Histories: The Exhibition of Postwar Art and the Interpretation of the Past in Divided Germany, 1950-1959

by

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To My Parents and to Andrew

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Making Histories: The Exhibition of Postwar Art and the Interpretation of the Past in Divided Germany, 1950-1959

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The exhibition of painting and the public discourse around it were vital tools in the postwar ideological differentiation of liberal-democratic West Germany and socialist East Germany. This dissertation examines six major German art exhibitions of the 1950s: the West German shows *Iron and Steel*, sponsored by West German industrialists in 1952, the first postwar exhibition of the Federation of German Artists in 1951, the first and second *documentas* in 1955 and 1958, and East Germany's *Third* and *Fourth German Art Exhibitions*, held in 1953 and 1959. I consider the organization and contents of these exhibitions as well as their reception in the press, and I examine the wider discussion of contemporary art that these shows engendered. In each case, lingering National Socialist styles and sentiments required Germans to create selective histories for their postwar states. I reveal the intense competition between East and West

Germans to define postwar German culture in different arenas: in corporate public relations within West German industry, among the surviving members of the prewar German avant-garde in West Germany, in West Germany's major forays into the international contemporary artworld, within the East German state bureaucracy and among East Germany's elite, progressive artists. At these exhibitions, East and West German artists, critics, and politicians defined their respective states as distinct from the National Socialist state, but also as radically different from one another.

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Introduction

In 1945 the Germans stood between the ruins of National Socialism and an unknown future. German lives had been shattered by war, imprisonment, and displacement, political structures had disintegrated, and social ties had been severed abruptly. Adding to the turmoil brought on by the Allied victory and the loss of the German state was the subsequent Allied occupation, which demanded from the German people a radical ideological reorientation. This chaotic period between the end of the Nazi state and the gradual emergence of postwar German statehood is frequently described in scholarly and popular studies of twentieth-century Germany as a "zero hour," a moment cut off from the immediate past. This was a rupture characterized by alienation and uncertainty, but at the same time, the zero hour also bore the potential for a new, better beginning for Germany after the turbulent first half of the twentieth century. As one West German artist recalled forty years after the end of the war: "What exactly I wanted to do in the 'zero hour' we had been given was unclear. But gradually it dawned on me. There was no world view, no ready-made image of the world. That was yet to be constructed."[1]

And yet in spite of the significant break brought about by the demise of the Nazi state and the end of the war, time did not stop when Germany capitulated. The notion of a zero hour is problematic because it implies that what happened before May 1945 had no bearing on what came after, as if, for all their material and emotional hardships, the Germans began life after the war with a clean slate and without the burden of their

[1] Hann Trier, interview published in Bernhard Schultz, ed., *Grauzonen/Farbwelten. Kunst und Zeitbilder, 1945-1955* (Berlin: NGBK/Medusa, 1983), 250.

individual involvements in National Socialism. The reality of postwar life was quite different. Far from living in a "zero hour," in the postwar period Germans were actively sorting out their own past.[2] The immediate, incriminating past of National Socialism constantly informed the public definition of the two new German states, even as many Germans sought continuity with the more positive phases of their nation's past and culture. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that visual art, especially painting, played a key role in establishing these connections to the past and in creating a viable future for the German states. Public debates around art and offered the Germans the opportunity to differentiate their two fledgling postwar nations from the Nazi state, and to simultaneously distinguish between East and West as the Cold War gained momentum.

In the four chapters that make up my study, I examine six art exhibitions and the general public dialogue on art that both emerged from them and provided their larger context. Four of these shows were held during the first half of the 1950s: the West German *Deutscher Künstlerbund* (Federation of German Artists) exhibition of 1951 in Berlin; *documenta. Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*documenta. Art of the Twentieth Century*, or *documenta*) in Kassel in 1955; and the exhibition *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl 1952* (*Art Exhibition Iron and Steel 1952*, or *Iron and Steel*) in Düsseldorf in 1952; and the East German *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (*Third German Art Exhibition*) of 1953, which took place in Dresden. The last two exhibitions I consider date from the end of the decade: *Vierte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (*Fourth German Art Exhibition*) in

[2] Stephen Brockmann provides an insightful overview of the zero hour discussion in "German Culture at the 'Zero Hour'," in Stephen Brockmann and Frank Trommler eds., *Revisiting Zero Hour 1945: The Emergence of Postwar German Culture* (Washington, DC: The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1996), 8-40. More recently, Brockmann has keenly observed that the "ongoing and almost ritual debunking of the zero hour has, paradoxically, contributed to its persistence as a concept." See Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 1.

Dresden in 1958-59 and *II. documenta—Kunst nach 1945* (*2nd documenta—Art After 1945* (hereafter *documenta II*), held in Kassel in 1959. These six exhibitions were of course not the only ones to be held between 1950 and 1960 in the two Germanies, but I have chosen these particular examples because they were major public events that reached large audiences and were the focus of extended attention in the press. Importantly, they also are representative of specific issues and practices that characterize postwar representations of the nature and purpose of contemporary German art, in particular the treatment of National Socialism and of the German art of the early twentieth century. Such themes were used by the East and West German artists, critics, art historians, and politicians who created these exhibitions and interpreted them in the press to put forth malleable, often competing histories of twentieth-century Germany.[3]

Exhibitions provide a venue at which participants (organizers, artists, reviewers) communicate a consciously-produced narrative that is designed to speak to a broader public.[4] In the 1950s, art exhibitions were well suited to articulating postwar East and

[3] Overall, this process is closely related to what historians Robert Moeller and Jeffrey Herf discuss as a type of selective memory. See Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). Refuting the often-repeated assumption that Germans simply chose to ignore their past, Moeller writes that, on the contrary, "[m]any accounts of Germany's 'most recent history' circulated in the Fifties; remembering selectively was not the same as forgetting" (16).

[4] Most theorizing on the exhibition as a representational practice has been contributed by scholars concerned with art, ethnographic, or history museums. Walter Grasskamp's work on *documenta* and Stephanie Barron's reconstruction of *Degenerate Art* offer two examples of how we might read historical exhibitions for some of the same issues of narrative construction, interpretation of objects, and the political implication of installation. See Barron, *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art / New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1991) and Grasskamp, for example Grasskamp, "'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994),163-191. For general considerations of the museum in communicating ideas of national and other types of identity and history, see for example Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking About Exhibitions* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); and Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

West German cultural and political identities, in particular because the visual arts had been a target of National Socialist censorship; the free, public discussion of art offered proof that Germany had rejected Nazi cultural politics. At the same time, the record left by these exhibitions provides important evidence of the processes behind Cold War cultural polarization in central Europe. Like the permanent museum exhibition, to which it is closely related, the temporary exhibition "constitute[s] a highly observable politics."[5] And, like the museum, the exhibition exudes an air of authority that is produced through the organizers' installation and interpretation of the objects on display within it. And yet, as I explore in the chapters that follow, that air of authority can be depleted in the exhibition's reception, or—despite the efforts of the organizers—it can be rendered ineffective by the artworks themselves.

Due in part to differences in the archival material available, my reconstruction and use of each of these exhibitions varies. In some cases, such as that of the first *documenta* in 1955, I am able to draw on existing reconstructions and to analyze the actual installation of the show, whereas in others, like the first Deutscher Künstlerbund show, the exhibition record is less complete and a complete reconstruction is impossible.[6] These variations in the available materials mean that in each chapter my discussion has a somewhat different focus. The exhibition, however, remains an integral part of the discussion in each case. Thus in Chapter One, when I examine the Künstlerbund I consider its first postwar exhibition as an early culmination of the group's efforts to

[5] Bruce W. Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics: Material Speech and Utter Sense," in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruces W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (New York: Routledge, 1996), 176.

[6] The work of Walter Grasskamp, Harald Kimpel, and Karin Stengel has made a close study of *documenta* possible. See for example Kimpel and Stengel, *documenta 1955. Erste Internationale Kunstausstellung - eine fotografische Rekonstruktion* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995) and Grasskamp, *Die unbewältigte Moderne: Kunst und Öffentlichkeit* (München: C. H. Beck, 1989).

regain public prominence, but I also expand this discussion by examining other public manifestations of the group, such as its campaigns to combat reactionary art production and criticism in West Germany. Similarly, by virtue of the archival record my investigation of the show *Iron and Steel* in Chapter Two is primarily limited to the negotiations and planning which preceded the exhibition's opening. However, my discussion widens to consider the exhibition as one part of West German industry's larger efforts to create a new, but historically-grounded, public identity for itself. In this context, *Iron and Steel* offers especially clear proof that the postwar art exhibition was a useful venue for the public articulation of new understandings of Germany's past and of emerging definitions of the German nation in the context of the newly-divided state. In the cases of the Künstlerbund and *Iron and Steel*, an exhibition acts, in essence, as one part of a larger campaign for public awareness.

In the process of my research it became obvious that, especially in cases in which the preparation or installation of an exhibition is not adequately recorded in the historical material, the exhibition catalog is an indispensable resource. This is not to suggest that the catalog can be accepted, uncritically, as a truthful account or representation of the show, or that it can take the place of administrative and other types of documentation. Rather, I argue the opposite: an exhibition catalog must be considered a part of the show, but it is always more than just a record. The authors and designers of a catalog (often, but not always, the authors and designers of the show as well) offer a separate interpretation of the objects contained in the adjacent exhibition. A catalog records and orders objects, including objects not in the show; it suggests relationships between those objects; and it constructs its own narrative. In the case of *Iron and Steel*, for example, the catalog asserts

a narrative that competed with the intended narrative of the exhibition. Meanwhile, the catalog of the *Third German Art Exhibition* reveals the conceptual weaknesses of the very art it was intended to promote as evocative and innovative. Even as it serves to reinforce the ideas presented in an exhibition, then, a catalog also communicates meaning independently. Importantly, in the cases I consider here, that meaning is often at odds with the meaning sought by the organizers of the exhibitions.

The analyses within my individual chapters make clear that each of these six exhibitions was unique in terms of the goals of its organizers, the means with which they sought to achieve those goals, and the public response to their efforts. The Künstlerbund's 1951 exhibition provided the first high-profile, comprehensive overview of West German contemporary art after the war, while the first *documenta* was unique in combining early twentieth century and contemporary art, as well as international and West German works, on a large scale. *Iron and Steel* represented West German industry's first significant sponsorship of the visual arts. And although the *Third German Art Exhibition* was one in a series, it represented a breaking point in the refinement of East German art politics, a moment at which artists and politicians were forced to reevaluate each others' understandings of the nature and function of art within a socialist society. With gaps of five and four years, respectively, between each show and its predecessor, my final comparison of the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* and the second *documenta* throws into relief the shifts in East and West German understandings of representation and politics at the end of the decade. These two later shows demonstrate that abstraction and socialist realism, a dichotomy that is taken for granted in much scholarship on

German postwar art, were not fixed categories but remained highly contested on both sides in the late 1950s.

Each of these exhibitions, then, engaged a different set of problems and was oriented toward a different goal. But what is crucial to this project are the similarities these highly varied exhibitions shared: all six were sites at which participants put into action a number of important processes that contributed to the definition of the two German states. These processes include the interpretation of the recent past, the rebuilding of international contexts and relationships, and the creation of new definitions of modern art. It is through these processes, enacted at the exhibitions and within the larger public discussions that grew up around them, that Germans articulated distinct postwar cultural and political identities for East and West. Together these exhibitions yield a body of evidence which makes possible a more nuanced account of cultural reconstruction in postwar Germany.[7]

Some of my subjects, notably the first *documenta* and the *Third German Art Exhibition*, have already received scholarly attention, while others, especially *documenta II* and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*, are less studied. *Iron and Steel* and the

[7] Karin Thomas' volume *Kunst in Deutschland seit 1945* (Cologne: Dumont Verlag, 2000) offers an improvement over earlier considerations of East and West German art, but is so massive in its scope that the details of each period are eclipsed by the overarching project. The dominant historical narrative of German art in the 1950s has focused primarily on the Federal Republic and has been constructed largely at exhibitions such as *Westkunst* (1988) and *Kunst im Westen* (1996), which framed the art of postwar West Germany explicitly in terms of the *Informel*, or total abstraction. This strategy in effect projects the dominance of that style backwards on the early 1950s without sufficiently acknowledging the diversity of styles with which the *Informel* coexisted, or the process through which that style came to be dominant in the Federal Republic. Art in East Germany has, until very recently, been largely disregarded in these types of surveys. The fiasco of the three-part exhibition *Rise and Fall of the Modern* (Weimar, 1999) was the most interesting example of Western, abstraction-centric interpretations of German art in the twentieth century. *German Art From Beckman to Richter* (*Deutschlandbilder*, Berlin, 1996) was a more successful attempt at a comparative look at East and West German art, but the art of the GDR comes up short in that catalog as well. Only at the recent exhibition *Kunst in der DDR* (Berlin, 2003) did a more objective survey of postwar East German art take shape, though that show was not without problems of its own, given that it was in many ways an attempt to separate the GDR's "real" art from its "state art." See Eugen Blume and Roland Marz eds., *Kunst in der DDR: eine Retrospektive der Nationalgalerie* (Berlin: G+H Verlag, 2003).

Deutscher Künstlerbund's 1951 show have received almost no attention beyond a few brief mentions in surveys of West German art in the 1950s.[8] Whatever their relative presence in the existing literature, the interpretation these exhibitions receive within my overall narrative is new. I consider each one in terms of its active encounter with the past and the present, a process which plays out at each show in a different public arena: among the West German avant-garde, through the corporate patronage of the West German steel industry, and among the members and leadership of the East German state union of visual artists. In these contexts, national and regional politicians, industrialists, and, in the East, the leaders of the GDR's Socialist Unity Party and their Soviet advisors, used art to reinforce the values of liberal democracy and socialism, respectively. At the same time, German artists, alone and in groups, worked within the confines of these institutions—corporations, the state, and the Party—to create new historical narratives and contemporary identities of their own.

Style as Political Barometer: Contemporary Definitions

Throughout my discussion I use the terms "abstraction" and "figuration" to describe the two extremes of artistic styles or representational modes that coexisted in German artistic production in the 1950s. I use "abstraction" or "abstract" to designate art that is non-objective, that is, art that apparently rejects the representation of the physical forms of nature. By "figuration," or "figurative," I mean representational art, or art that

[8] *Iron and Steel* has been discussed very briefly by Martin Damus in his survey of West German art. It is also included in Lutz Engelskirchen's essay "Eisen und Stahl—Ausstellungen zum Industriebild in Deutschland," in the catalog of the 2002 exhibition *Die Zweite Schöpfung* at the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin, Sabine Beneke and Hans Ottomeyer, eds., *Die Zweite Schöpfung. Bilder der industriellen Welt vom 18. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2002). There is no definitive history of the Künstlerbund, although arthistorical accounts from the 1950s consider the 1951 show to have been significant. See Martin Damus, *Malerei der DDR. Funktionen der Kunst im Realen Sozialismus* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991) and Sabine Beneke and Hans Ottomeyer, *Die Zweite Schöpfung. Bilder der industriellen Welt vom 18. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2002).

retains references to the real world. As stylistic categories, both abstraction and figuration encompass a wide range of different styles, and of course they often overlap, as the expressive figuration of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner demonstrates [see fig.]. But I employ these rather broad definitions in order to characterize the general distinctions made between abstraction and figuration in the discourse of the 1950s. At the same time, I seek to keep my definitions distinct from the contemporary usages of the terms that I identify and discuss in my studies of the exhibitions and their reception. The contemporary definitions of the 1950s are often contradictory and inconsistent, but that inconsistency is part of the volatile nature of artistic production and interpretation of the time.

Indeed, the vagaries of these definitions indicate that the Cold-War binary of abstraction and figuration which has been repeated in much of the art historical literature was not inevitable. As my fourth chapter shows, at the end of the decade supporters of West German abstraction and East German socialist realism were still confronted by opposition from within their own states to these styles and to the definition of contemporary reality that they tried to promote through those styles. In other words, stylistic variety is a crucial indicator of the still-flexible, selective understandings of the German past and German identity that were in circulation in the early 1950s. At the time, the political division of Germany was still relatively new, but both East and West Germans were already enlisting contemporary art to represent the realities and potentials of their new states, and to articulate their ideological differences. In the public debates which developed in response to these exhibitions, art becomes a means of distinguishing between the old and outdated and the new, innovative, and inspiring.

BRINGING THE PAST TO BEAR: EXPRESSIONISM AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM

My analysis of these six exhibitions and the wider public debate on contemporary art demonstrates that Expressionism was a major touchstone for critics writing in East and West Germany in the 1950s, as was the art politics of National Socialism. Expressionist art was both the greatest success of twentieth century German art and the major target of hostile National Socialist art policies. After 1945, these two facts alone were enough to necessitate a reconsideration of Expressionism within Germany; reclaiming Expressionism was a way to purge National Socialism's influence from German culture. In the following brief discussion, I offer an overview of the ways in which artists, critics, and politicians working in the 1950s interpreted these significant chapters in Germany's art history. My goal here is not to present a comprehensive survey of Expressionism and National Socialist art. Instead I describe them here to provide a general background for the individual chapters, which deal with the perception and interpretation of those styles after the second World War.

Expressionism

The term "Expressionism" came into use around 1911.[9] It did not originally describe a cohesive style, but instead was applied by German critics to new art emerging not just in Germany, but throughout Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century in

[9] For a concise summary of the history of the term "Expressionism" and its various contemporary uses, see Charles Haxthausen, "A Critical Illusion: 'Expressionism' in the Writings of Wilhelm Hausenstein," in Rainer Rumold and O. K. Werckmeister, eds., *The Ideological Crisis of Expressionism* (Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1990), 169-173. Scholars generally describe German Expressionism chronologically as lasting from around 1905 (the year the artists' group die Brücke was founded) until about 1920. See Shulamith Behr, David Fanning, and Douglas Jarman, eds., "Expressionism Reassessed," in *Expressionism Reassessed* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 2. Behr et al. place the "end" of Expressionism at the 1925 *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition in Mannheim in 1925, but it seems more accurate to note the critiques of Expressionism that began to appear around 1919-1920 as at least heralding the decline of the movement. Two more important of these essays are Wilhelm Hausenstein's "Die Kunst in diesem Augenblick" of 1919 and Wilhelm Worringer's "Künstlerische Zeitfragen" 1921.

a somewhat belated stylistic opposition to *Im*pressionism. In the German context, Expressionism was "not a close-knit art school but a vaguely defined art 'movement' whose participants began their activity independently, in five or six German-speaking cities, regions, or even countries…."[10] No single, comprehensive manifesto of German Expressionism was written as was the case in Italian Futurism, for example, although individual artists and artists' groups like die Brücke and der blaue Reiter did publicize their common desire to embody a new, and revolutionary, attitude towards art and society.[11] German artists found many of their inspirations and impetuses in the work of the French post-Impressionists, but the Fauves, Art Nouveau, and Symbolism were also important sources.[12] In general, Expressionist practitioners sought not to describe the natural world but to give voice to their own internal worlds, sharing the belief that, as Paul Klee famously phrased it, "[a]rt does not reproduce the visible, rather, it makes visible."[13] Artists who worked in expressionist modes made use of highly stylized, energetic line and symbolic color, typified by Franz Marc's *The Fate of the Animals* (1913) [Fig. I.1].[14] In Germany, Expressionism included largely figurative modes, like that of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the Brücke artists, as well as highly abstracted styles, like those developed by Wassily Kandinsky. Kirchner's *Women in the Street* (1915) [Fig.

[10] Donald Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xv.
[11] See, for example, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, "Brücke Program" and "Chronicle of the Brücke," reprinted in Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Expressionism*, 23-25, and Wassily Kandinsky, "Foreword to the *Neue Künstler Vereinigung* Catalog" and "The Struggle for Art," excerpted in Washton Long, 39-14.
[12] See for example Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1957 (1974), vi, and Donald Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea*, 174-176.
[13] Paul Klee, "Creative Credo," in *The Inward Vision; Watercolors, Drawings, Writings* (New York, H.N. Abrams, 1958).
[14] Marc was popular after World War Two and was the focus of one of the first large-scale retrospectives of modern painting in West Germany, sponsored by the Volkswagen corporation and held in Wolfsburg in 1952. See Widmann, Katja. "'Eine Gemäldeausstellung in dieser Arbeiterstadt?' Kunst in den Aufbaujahren Wolfsburgs und Stalinstadts," in Aufbau West, Aufbau Ost. Die Planstädte Wolfsburg und Eisenhüttenstadt in der Nachkriegszeit. Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1997), 22. March 2000, <http://dhme.dhm.de/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg35.htm>(19. December 2002).

I.2] reflects the artist's subjective use of color and vehement brushstroke, while Kandinsky's *Composition IV* (1911) [Fig. I.3] demonstrates the artist's gradual development of a symbolic language of total abstraction. Both of these modes, figurative and abstract, were important touchstones for postwar German artists.

These general characteristics of Expressionism are crucial to an understanding of the reassessment of Expressionist art in the 1950s. I return to them in more detail in Chapter One, but it is worth pointing out here that one of the most important aspects of Expressionism for the postwar commentators who invoked it was that it represented Germany's foremost contribution to international modernism. Before World War II, exhibitions of modern German painting and sculpture outside of Germany had been dominated by Expressionist works, as was the case at Alfred Barr's *Modern German Painting and Sculpture* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1931.[15] The New Burlington Galleries in London held a similar show, the *Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art*, in 1938. This exhibition was comprised largely of Expressionist artworks and was one of the last major international retrospectives of German art before World War II. But unlike Barr's earlier show, the London exhibition was expressly political, a defiant response to the violent suppression of Expressionist and post-Expressionist representation by the National Socialists within Germany.[16] The East and West German projects of reclaiming Expressionism were grounded both in a rediscovery of the movement's prior international stature and in a need to make amends for its defamation by the National Socialists.

[15] Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Modern German Painting and Sculptur*e, originally published 1931 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art / Arno Press, 1972).
[16] *Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art* (London: New Burlington Galleries, 1938).

Early twentieth-century definitions of Expressionism held that it was both international and German; these qualities were especially well suited to the project of postwar West Germans who sought both an identifiably "German" art and one which allowed access to the international art community.[17] Equally important to the mid-twentieth-century consideration of Expressionism is its purported decline around 1920. Beginning in 1919, former supporters like Wilhelm Worringer and Wilhelm Hausenstein indicted the movement for the apparent loss of its revolutionary roots and for Expressionist style's increasing popularity and integration into the bourgeois artworld.[18] These objections were raised by prominent art critics, were widely discussed, and were no doubt familiar to the critics who reassessed Expressionism in the 1950s. Here the use of Expressionism begins to split noticeably in the East and West German examples. The West German artists and critics I consider below rarely mention the earlier "failure" of Expressionism to provide a sustainable avant-garde practice in Germany, whereas the majority of East German investigations of Expressionism condemn it as having been inherently flawed, decadent, and "cosmopolitan."[19] Many of the Germans who shaped the art politics of the GDR had been in exile in the USSR during the Expressionism debate of the 1930s; this would have necessarily effected their treatment of Expressionism in the

[17] Another original aspect of Expressionism that could have impacted its reception in the 1950s is its perceived opposition to naturalistic art (which for critics in the 1910s included Impressionism; but the more conventional or academic naturalistic styles are more pertinent to my discussion).
[18] The most important of these assessments were Worringer's *Künstlerische Zeitfragen* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1921) and Hausenstein's *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Anstalt, 1920).
[19] One possibility is that the styles that came after it, equally impossible to classify in a comprehensive way and thus most easily termed "post-Expressionist" (including *Neue Sachlichkeit*) were less important internationally. In addition, those later styles that were more naturalistically figurative appeared to some critics to have disturbing affinities to the naturalistic painting that flourished in the Nazi period.

1950s.[20] Regardless of the opposing nature of these two interpretations, in both East and West Germany the postwar history of Expressionism was a selective one, a narrative used to help define contemporary art and to locate it within a specific, larger historical trajectory of German art.

National Socialist Art and Art Politics

After 1945, East and West Germans evoked modern art and especially Expressionism as victims of Nazi cultural politics. But Expressionist representation more broadly had occupied a complicated position within National Socialism. Certainly the Nazis' institutional denigration of modern art at the 1937 exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (*Degenerate Art*) in Munich stands out as most representative of the Nazi attitude. However, National Socialist policy towards Expressionism and other modern representation was not always so clear-cut as it was in the sweeping raids of German museums that supplied *Degenerate Art*. Before 1935, the Nazi Party had no cohesive guidelines regarding modern art, largely because Hitler had not yet made any definitive proclamation and was himself somewhat conflicted on the subject.[21] Nevertheless, local Nazi officials began attacking modern artists and arts administrators as early as 1930, and removed as many as 20 directors and curators in 1933 alone.[22] At the same time, arts

[20] Ulrike Niederhofer discusses the debates over the integration of Expressionism in the GDR in *Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Expressionismus in der Bildenden Kunst im Wandel der politischen Realität der SBZ und der DDR, 1945-1989* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1996).

[21] See Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 20, and Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson, 2002), 152.

[22] Barron, *Degenerate Art*, 12-15, and Spotts, 153. Still earlier, the conservative parties newly in power in the state of Thuringia, in which the Weimar Bauhaus was located, drastically cut funding to the school, effectively forcing it to close in 1925. The Bauhaus moved to Dessau in Sachsen Anhalt, where the local Social Democratic government allowed the school to build new facilities. Gropius resigned in 1928, and in 1932 increasing pressure from local Nazi politicians forced the school, now under the leadership of Mies van der Rohe, to move to Berlin. Hermann Göring, Prussian minister of the Interior, closed the Berlin

policy was dictated by Joseph Goebbels, Reichminister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, who was himself an advocate of certain types of Expressionism and who maintained a more pragmatic attitude toward expressionist art that evinced "Germanic" or "Nordic" qualities as late as 1935, when Hitler formally made modern art illegal.[23] Even after Hitler's definitive declaration against modern art, Goebbels continued to tacitly permit, and even promote, the work of the nationalistic Expressionist artists' organization Der Norden (The North). Goebbels was also a avid supporter of the work of the painter Emil Nolde, a well-known Expressionist artist and National Socialist Party member, and he openly admired the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch's painting; for Goebbels, the work both of these artists had an essential Germanic quality.[24] But in order to shore up his influence within the structure of the NSDAP during an acute competition with Alfred Rosenberg in 1933-34, Goebbels concealed his selective appreciation of Expressionism and reinforced the mainstream National Socialist condemnation of all modern artforms.

Nazi theories regarding modern art were largely shaped by the racial pseudoscience of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most significantly by

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Bauhaus in April 1933. See Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus* (Köln: Taschen, 2002), 227. See also Michaud 127 and Petropoulos *Art as Politics* 20.

[23] See Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*, 22-25. Petropoulos describes Goebbels as a sincere supporter of modern art in both his political dealings and in his private life, though this support was also pragmatic and served his nationalist interests: "First and foremost, he was an ultranationalist and supported any art form that brought acclaim to Germany. His main concern lay in encouraging the production of the highest quality art possible, and he therefore opposed any doctrinaire *Kunstpolitik* on the grounds that it would hinder creativity." (24)

[24] Goebbels competed with Nazi idealogue Alfred Rosenberg for definitive control of art politics. Founder of the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Combat League for German Culture, KfdK) and editor of the widely-read newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* (Folkish Observer), Rosenberg promoted a "*völkisch*" (folkish, that is, ethnic-nationalist) aesthetic which favored naturalistic representation with nationalistic themes. Although Goebbels enjoyed Hitler's full support (and a ministerial appointment), Rosenberg retained some influence as the ideological head of the National Socialist Party. See Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson, 2002), 74-75.

Max Nordau's book *Entartung* (*Degeneration*, 1892).[25] Race theory was used by opponents of modernism to link race and relative racial inferiority to artistic style. The Nazi ideologue Paul Schultze-Naumburg used Nordau's ideas in his 1928 booklet *Kunst und Rasse* (Art and Race), in which he juxtaposed modern artworks and photographs of individuals with mental and physical disabilities.[26] In *Kunst und Rasse*, which had a significant impact on Nazi art politics, Schultze-Naumburg focused much of his attention on the Expressionists, whom he believed represented the weak and decayed aspects of German culture.[27] These assertions supported the National Socialist purge of modern art in the 1930s. At the NSDAP party rally in Nuremberg in 1935, Hitler finally declared modernism an enemy of the German nation: "It is not the function of art to wallow in dirt for dirt's sake, never its task to paint men only in a state of decomposition, to draw cretins as the symbol of motherhood, to picture hunch-backed idiots as representatives of manly strength."[28]

As the noose tightened around modern artists, those who remained in Germany and were not imprisoned were prohibited from producing and showing their work through the bureaucracy of the *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture, or RKK). The RKK was structured so that "the state may evaluate the individual artist as an effective person according to his creative work, his purpose in life (*Lebensinhalt*), and the meaning of his life (*Lebenssinn*)."[29] Membership in the RKK was mandatory for all artists, and officials in the individual chambers could determine on a case by case basis

[25] Max Nordau, *Entartung* (Berlin: C. Duncker, 1896).
[26] Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Kunst und Rasse* (München: Lehmann, 1928).
[27] See Stephanie Barron, "1937. Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany," in Stephanie Barron, ed., *Degenerate Art* (Los Angeles and New York: LACMA and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 11-12.
[28] Quoted in Norman H. Baynes, *The speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939* (London; New York, Oxford University press, 1942), 579.
[29] Goebbels, quoted in Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1963), 56.

whether an applicant met the requirements for entering the Chamber. Those who did not, whether on ideological or stylistic grounds, were denied membership and/or received *Malverbot*, a painting ban, or *Ausstellungsverbot*, a ban on exhibiting. Thus even Nolde, a party member and a favorite of Goebbels, was banned from painting in 1941.[30]

Like Expressionism, National Socialist art is an essential part of the definitions of postwar art articulated at the exhibitions and public discussions I examine below. The art promoted by the National Socialists was figurative in form and "Germanic" in content. Its theorists and artists found appropriate stylistic models in the art of the German Renaissance, Romanticism, and in the nineteenth-century naturalism of painters like Wilhelm Leibl, whose subjects, as in *Die Dorfpolitiker* (Village Politicians, 1877) [Fig. I.4], were Bavarian workers and peasants. The influence of these models can been seen in work from the 1930s and 1940s in which artists rendered acceptable Nazi subject matter in conservative figurative styles; for example, the German family, as painted by Paul Matthias Padua in *Der Führer Spricht* (The Führer Speaks, 1939) [Fig. I.5], the German soldier, as in Padua's *10. Mai 1940* (Tenth of May 1940, 1940) [Fig. I.6], and German land, as depicted by Werner Peiner in *Deutsche Erde* (German Land, c. 1935) [Fig. I.7]. This conservatively representational art is far removed from the formal experimentation of the modern art against which it was pitted by the National Socialists at the *Degenerate Art* show in 1937. But unless it is specifically related by the artist through definitive formal choices or an unequivocal title (the insignia on a soldier's uniform, for example, or "the Führer speaking" on the living room radio, a portrait of Hitler on the wall), there is little in the form and content of such pictures to distinguish it from conservative German art made prior to the Nazi period. Rather, it was the context of National

[30] Petropoulos, *Art as Politics*, 95.

Socialism, which absolutely commandeered art to serve its cause, that defined "Nazi" art; National Socialism adapted certain modes of representational artmaking to its ideological needs.

But Hitler's 1933 observation that "Art has at all times been the expression of an ideological and religious experience and at the same time the expression of a political will" resonated in postwar understandings of figurative art, as many Germans continued to associate naturalistic representation with National Socialism.[31] After the war, the strictly naturalistic, figurative style promoted by Nazi ideologues served as the antithesis of contemporary German artistic production. In the postwar debates I have studied, it is often evoked in both the East and West German discussions by observers who praise the advances made in artistic freedom in new German art as evidence that Germany has overcome the reactionary politics of the National Socialists. Even when Nazi art goes unmentioned, it occupied a place in the 1950s, and as my discussions of *Iron and Steel*, the Künstlerbund, and the *Third German Art Exhibition* illustrate, the legacy of National Socialist figurative styles rendered suspect any new art that appeared to echo their formal characteristics. At the same time, after the war Germans sought to make amends for the National Socialists' systematic persecution of modern artists, many of whom worked in Expressionist modes. Nazi art and Expressionism functioned as two sides of a coin, victim and perpetrator, in the postwar discussion of German art. Returning to Expressionism, as did the organizers and media observers of the Künstlerbund, *documenta*, and the first *German Art Exhibition* in Dresden in 1949, was thus a means of righting one of the wrongs of the Nazi period. Importantly, it also provided postwar

[31] Adolf Hitler, speech given at the *Parteitag* in Nuremberg, 2. September 1933. See Norman H. Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939 : An English Translation of Representative Passages* (New York: H. Fertig, 1969).

Germans with a world-renowned, nationally-coded art practice that facilitated Germany's reunion with the international community from which it had ostracized itself in 1933.

MAJOR DEBATES OF THE LATE 1940S AND EARLY 1950S

With the end of the National Socialist period, the hegemony of naturalistic representation ended as well, and German artists were once more free to explore publicly a variety of representational modes. Questions immediately arose about which style was most appropriate to the new Germany, and with the division of Germany into two separate states, two definitions of German art gradually became apparent. In the west, the late 1940s and early 1950s were marked by an extensive public argument over abstract and representational art, with abstract art appearing as the presumptive victor at *documenta* in 1955 only to be cast into doubt again in subsequent debates. In the east, the debate pitted supporters of modern representation against those who favored figurative modes modeled on Soviet socialist realism. In both East and West Germany, the terminology of this stylistic and political discussion derived from early twentieth-century art criticism, on the one hand from modernist writing on abstraction, Expressionism, Surrealism, and New Objectivity or post-Expressionism, and on the other from the racist theories which had been adapted by the National Socialists. In vocabulary and idea, the stylistic debates of the postwar period relied heavily on what came before. But the critics of the late 1940s and early 1950s contended with an additional ideological factor that was central to the definition of the two postwar German nations: the dynamic between liberal democracy and socialism. What is striking about the postwar debate on style is that, in spite of this ideological split, the arguments of its more conservative participants in both East and West Germany bear striking similarities to one another in vocabulary and in

content. The following brief survey is meant to outline these debates, to which I return at length in my chapters.

In the west, two works of art theory or criticism were central to the public discussion of the role of modern art in the reconstruction of German culture after the war: the painter Willi Baumeister's 1947 *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (The Unknown in Art) and the architectural historian Hans Sedlmayr's 1948 *Verlust der Mitte* (Loss of the Center).[32] Both Baumeister and Sedlmayr associate modern art with a widespread increase in subjectivity and with the individual's corresponding retreat from the outside world.[33] For Baumeister this retreat is necessary because truth can only be found inside the individual; for Sedlmayr, escaping the degeneration of the modern world is critical to humanity's survival. Baumeister argues that the Enlightenment freed the artist from exclusively religious patronage and subject matter, allowing him to develop his own subjectivity.[34] It is his restored subjectivity which enables the artist to regain access to the Unknown, which for Baumeister is a primal neutrality in which man, God, and the universe were originally united.[35] Baumeister posits that total abstraction, such as his own painting, was the ideal expression of this godly unity.[36] In *Loss of the Center,* Sedlmayr also argues that modern art, especially abstraction, is the result of modern man's distancing himself from religion after the Enlightenment. But for Sedlmayr, modern man

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[32] Willi Baumeister, *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (Stuttgart: Curt E. Schwab Verlag, 1947); Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1948).

[33] Yule Heibel has contributed an excellent investigation of the question of subjectivity in postwar West Germany; see Yule F. Heibel, *Reconstructing the Subject. Modernist Painting in Western Germany, 1945-1950* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995).

[34] Willi Baumeister, *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (Stuttgart: Curt E. Schwab Verlag, 1947), 10.

[35] Ibid., 15.

[36] Ibid., 99. For Baumeister, abstraction is the ideal formal expression of the *Unbekannte*. Naturalism, he states, cannot allow for mystery: representation masks the primal forces of the universe to which the artist alone has access. These, he reasons, are best related in pure color and form (16). This theorization appears to owe much to Worringer's discussion of *Formwillen*, as well as to Kandinsky's concept of "Inner Necessity;" Baumeister's philosophy is also informed by eastern thought.

suffers from his loss of proximity to God, and the tremendous confusion of the modern world is the culmination of centuries of decline stemming from that separation. Sedlmayr argues that humanity turned away from the godly in order to selfishly enjoy its material surroundings, which led to its decay and degeneration.[37] Thus what Baumeister understands as a creative spiritual subjectivity, Sedlmayr sees as the culmination of a denial of the godly, which modern art both expresses and perpetuates. For Sedlmayr, the pictures modern society makes of itself show the "inhuman, the sickly, morbid, dead, decomposing and deformed, the tortured, distorted, crass, obscene and the ravaged, the mechanical…."[38]

The basic ideas of Baumeister and Sedlmayr appear repeatedly in the public discussion of the exhibitions I study, and were part of a larger public debate on culture in the Federal Republic.[39] In one contribution to this discussion in 1950, Theodor W. Adorno touched on the problem of subjectivity and isolation in postwar German society after his return to West Germany from exile. Adorno notes that, although Germans are eager to engage in philosophical discussions, these discussions never address contemporary life. He interprets this as a reaction against Nazi repression of subjective

[37] Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte*, 150. After the currency reform in 1948, the eventual economic rebound and resulting consumerism of postwar West Germany would seem to validate Sedlmayr's assessment. Glaser notes that, in the midst of the *Wirtschaftswunder* (the "economic wonder" throughout the 1950s) that West Germans "were more concerned with prices than with values." Hermann Glaser, *Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Band II (München: Propyläen, 1985), 11.

[38] Sedlmayr, 132. Sedlmayr cites as examples the work of Egon Schiele and Georg Grosz, Schiele for "worshipping the flesh" and Grosz for revealing and even celebrating the decadence of the times. His argument obviously has much in common with turn-of-the-century racist cultural criticism like that of Max Nordau, and, by extension, that of Nazi ideologue Paul Schultze-Naumberg. See Ulrike Wollenhaupt-Schmidt, *documenta 1955. Eine Ausstellung im Spannungsfeld der Auseinandersetzungen um die Kunst der Avantgarde 1945-1960* (Frankfurt a. M. u.a.: Lang, 1994), 149-171.

[39] Sedlmayr's book was enormously popular and influenced the debate—often in a negative way—through the end of the 1950s. *Verlust der Mitte* had reached its fourth printing in 1951, a short three years after it was originally published; by 1965 180,000 copies had been sold. See Werner Hofmann, "Im Banne des Abgrunds. Der 'Verlust der Mitte' und der Exorzismus der Moderne: Über den Kunsthistoriker Hans Sedlmayr," in Gerda Breuer, ed., *Die Zähmung der Avantgarde. Zur Rezeption der Moderne in den 50er Jahren* (Basel: Stroemfeld Verlag, 1997), 43.

thought. After the war, he writes, "isolation is no longer experienced simply as a threat, but instead as a possible source of happiness."[40] Society in West Germany seemed to Adorno to be returning to a German classicism, rehashing philosophical questions only for the sake of the exercise, not in the interest of understanding contemporary life. This isolated intellectual exercise would lead, Adorno feared, to a new provincialism—an sort of isolation of society at large.[41]

In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), meanwhile, the rebirth of free artistic subjectivity had to be reconciled with the aims of the socialist state. An official campaign against modern art, especially abstraction, was well underway by 1948 and entered its first acute crisis in 1953. This so-called "formalism debate" involved German artists, critics, and politicians from both sides of the German border and from the Soviet Union. In this debate, which I discuss at length in Chapter Three, proponents of figuration in the GDR aligned themselves with the Soviet model. They created a binary opposition by which they judged all artistic production in East Germany. They distinguished between a vaguely-defined figurative mode that reflected the reality of socialism and that accurately expressed human potential, and a stylized, subjective, and thus decadent mode that was practiced in the west and by morally corrupt artists in the GDR.

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[40] Theodor Adorno, "Auferstehung der Kultur in Deutschland?" in *Frankfurter Heften* 5/1950, 470.

[41] In 1950, the so-called *Darmstädter Gespräch* (Darmstadt Conversation), a conference devoted to "The Image of Man in Our Time," brought together Baumeister and Sedlmayr, as well as Adorno and other intellectuals, artists, critics, and representatives from the social sciences and psychology, to discuss the representation of humanity across disciplines and in various. The positions I have outlined here were at the forefront of this 1950 meeting, as well, where the primary focus was the relative appropriateness of abstraction and figuration in shaping an image of humanity in the postwar context. The transcript of the Darmstädter Gespräch was published as Hans Gerhard Evers, ed., *Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit* (Darmstadt: Darmstädter Verlags-Anstalt, 1950. For an overview of the *Darmstädter Gespräch*, see Wollenhaupt-Schmidt, *documenta*, 239-246, Katja von der Bey, *Nationale Codierungen abstrakter Malerei: Kunstdiskurs und -ausstellungen im westlichen Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945 – 1952* (PhD. diss., University of Oldenburg, 1997), 149-150, and Gerda Breuer, ed., *Die Zähmung der Avantgarde. Zur Rezeption der Moderne in den 50er Jahren* (Basel: Stroemfeld Verlag, 1997).

One of the earliest contributions to this discussion was a series of essays published by the artists Karl Hofer and Oskar Nerlinger, co-editors of the East German art journal *bildende kunst* in 1948.[42] Hofer believed, like Baumeister, in the primacy of subjective experience and in the presence of a deeper, personal truth within the artwork.[43] Nerlinger insisted instead that art was necessarily political, and that German artists (in the east, at least) had a duty to assist in the creation of a new, socialist society by making work that reflected socialist ideals.[44] This largely cordial conversation between two colleagues launched a barrage of criticism aimed at Hofer by Soviet and East German Socialist Unity Party (SED) cultural officials which resulted in the artist's eventual flight from the east in 1949. It signaled the beginning of a focused campaign to critique and, at times, threaten East German artists into abandoning modern styles while admonishing them to produce socialist realism. The *Third German Art Exhibition* in 1953 brought to light the numerous contradictions and general difficulties embodied by the SED's definitions of socialist representation.

THE EXHIBITIONS

In their design, execution, and reception, all of the exhibitions I examine embody the tensions which developed between supporters of figurative and abstract styles as they sought to use art to ground Germany's present in its past. In Chapter One I consider how German art history, especially Expressionism, was used by West German art historians, critics, artists, and politicians to construct a lineage for postwar West German art. I do so by juxtaposing the activities of the Deutscher Künstlerbund in the early 1950s, including

[42] Hofer, a major figure in postwar German art, forms a touchstone throughout this dissertation because of the criticism of his work in the east and his leadership of the Künstlerbund in the west.
[43] Karl Hofer, "Kunst und Politik," in Gabriele Schultheiß, ed., *Zwischen Krieg und Frieden* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1980), 186.
[44] Oskar Nerlinger, "Politik und Kunst," in Schultheiß, 186.

its 1951 exhibition, with the first *documenta* in 1955. Demonstrating that German art had survived Nazism was central to the work of the Künstlerbund and to the organizers of *documenta*, and Expressionism offered the organizers of the two exhibitions a positive past that preceded National Socialism altogether. Within the Künstlerbund, that historical continuity was made manifest by living artists who had been targeted by the Nazis but had survived the Third Reich. At *documenta*, in contrast, Expressionism was a marker of a particular moment, long superseded, in the history of German art; references to that moment served to validate contemporary abstract production and to engage larger currents in international art.

Chapter Two deals with the 1952 show *Iron and Steel*, at which disparate representations of West German industry competed with one another. The exhibition was sponsored by the iron and steel producing corporations of the Federal Republic, and it was part of industry's creation of a new public role for itself in postwar Germany. Casting themselves as heirs to a longstanding tradition of industrialist patronage, the corporate sponsors of *Iron and Steel* called on West Germany's artists to produce innovative images of industry. But the images that emerged at the juried exhibition did not meet their expectations. In response, the sponsors organized their own ancillary exhibition, which was an attempt to promote what they considered to be more appropriate characterizations of their factories and professions. In this chapter, I evaluate the differences between the representation of industry in the show's juried artworks and that evoked by the corporate sponsors, especially as those different representations appear in *Iron and Steel's* catalog. The friction between the two highlights the fraught associations of the history which the sponsors sought to preserve.

My third chapter examines the problem of creating historical continuity in the GDR, but this case also reveals the essentially symbiotic nature of the relationship between the two German states in cultural politics.[45] Like their West German counterparts, East German politicians, critics, and artists had to address both modern modes like Expressionism and the naturalistic representation of National Socialism in the process of defining a new, socialist, German art. The coverage of the 1953 *German Art Exhibition* in the press and its reception by East Germans, Soviets, and West German visitors reveals that the show was not successful at advancing a German socialist realism as the Party had hoped it would be. This was due in large part to the Party's stylistic requirements for socialist realist art, which were mired in an insufficient understanding of naturalistic representation. The problematic associations between naturalistic style and Nazi art that the Künstlerbund drew attention to and that loomed large at *Iron and Steel* proved to be just as much of a hurdle in the contemporary art of the GDR.

Finally, in Chapter Four I consider how the issues raised at these earlier shows were borne out at the end of the decade at the exhibitions *documenta II* in Kassel in 1959 and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* in Dresden in winter 1958-59, and at two public conferences: the West German "Is Modern Art Being 'Managed'?" in Baden-Baden (October 1959) and the East German Fourth Congress of the Union of Visual Artists in Dresden (December 1959). Like their predecessors in 1955 and 1953, the two exhibitions were major public events that garnered attention in the national and international press. In

[45] Until the border was effectively sealed in 1961, artists, artworks, and ideas moved in both directions, and a crucial aspect of the *Third German Art Exhibition* was the participation of West German artists. The border never completely prevented exchange between the two Germanies, but at this early point it was a somewhat freer process. By the late 1970s it had once again loosened substantially, driven in part by a commercial demand for East German art in the Federal Republic. See Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus. Die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001).

both cases, the two conferences I consider were the most significant public responses to the exhibitions; they were discussions at which commentators tried to draw conclusions from the shows and to locate them in the larger cultural situation of their respective states. There is a span of five years between *documenta II* and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* and the shows that preceded them. But analyzing the later exhibitions makes possible a comparison of the objectives of the organizers and the public response to contemporary art and how these things changed over time. Such a comparison is crucial to a historical understanding of the dominant positions in East and West German art just before the Berlin Wall was built, emphatically materializing the division of Germany.

The major questions which arise in the three previous chapters surface in this last chapter again: what is the role of the past in defining postwar Germany's contemporary cultural identity, and what is the appropriate visual representation of that identity? Within the ongoing debates between supporters of abstraction and figuration in the west, and between competing understandings of socialist realism in the east, the focus this time is on definitions of reality in East and West German theories of contemporary art. In both cases, the organizers intended the shows to provide, or indeed to embody, definitive answers to this question. But the reception of the two shows and the arguments put forth by participants at the two conferences indicate that this goal was not met decisively in either case. At the end of the 1950s contemporary art in East and West Germany remained in dispute.

The evidence I present in this dissertation indicates that the conflict between abstract and figurative art in the 1950s was not only the result of competing notions of what was more "modern" or progressive in contemporary art. The Germans who are the

focus of my study were concerned with interpreting the past, so that the histories they composed could shape the present-day cultural identity of their respective countries. A secure contemporary identity, in turn, provided a means of reconnecting with a like-minded worldwide community, as the international overtures of the *documenta* exhibitions and the Soviet influences behind the Dresden shows indicate. My discussion moves between the broader social and political significance which the organizers and observers of these exhibitions claimed for themselves and the more narrow problems embodied in the paintings that anchored their individual arguments. In this regard the historical record has necessarily shaped how I have structured my study; I concentrate on painting rather than on sculpture or another medium because painting dominates contemporary conversations about art, while other mediums rarely enter the discussion.[46]

At times a detailed study of a painting has been a challenge because, for some of the works that are central to my discussion, a small, black and white reproduction is all that is available. Occasionally no record exists but the title of the work. Nevertheless, I have pursued close readings of key paintings because, where they are feasible, they shed vital light on the ideologically determined interpretations of those works in the 1950s. On closer inspection, these paintings demonstrate that the apparent Cold War dichotomy of an abstraction-oriented West and a realism-oriented East was only a partial reality. It was not spontaneously generated with the Allied occupation or even concurrent with the creation of the two German states in 1949. It instead came into existence gradually and

[46] Perhaps because much sculpture in West German remained primarily figurative well into the 1950s, it held a position somewhat outside of the modernist discourse. For this reason, it deserves to be treated on its own terms, something Birk Ohnesorge has begun to do by surveying the human image in postwar sculpture. See Birk Ohnesorge, *Bildhauerei zwischen Tradition und Erneuerung: die Menschenbilddarstellung in der deutschen Skulptur und Plastik nach 1945 im Spiegel repräsentativer Ausstellungen* (Münster: Lit, 2001).

was, perhaps, never fully established. The artists, critics, and politicians that are the actors in this study sought to reconcile their desire for historical grounding with a need to distance themselves and their new states from the stigma of National Socialism. The art exploited by East and West Germans in the interest of establishing this historical foundation was thus not simply an outgrowth of the governing ideologies of the two states, but was produced at the same time as the new nations' larger identities.

Chapter One: Creating a Continuity of the Modern in West Germany, 1951-55. From the Deutscher Künstlerbund to *Documenta*.

> It is too simplistic to claim that everything that was painted, sculpted, drawn, and etched during the National Socialist period was bad, simply because it was made in those years of homogenized opinion. But because elements foreign to true art forced their way into public appraisal and display, because the choice of subject promised more 'success' than the quality of its execution, because threats or defamation caused many artists to retreat—for all these reasons, our general knowledge of the quality of those with real ability suffered.
>
> Theodor Heuss
> Foreword, *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950. Erster Ausstellung Berlin 1951*[47]

> It is true that our European consciousness is shaped by our perception of the past, but it is most decisively determined by our being in the present. Thus we must not remain [caught] in an affectionate reminiscence, in a purely aesthetic reflection on that which has passed, rather we must remain open for the 'truth' of the present. Only then can the past and tradition be bound to the future.
>
> Heinz Lemke
> Foreword, *Documenta: Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts*[48]

A demonstrable continuity with the past was at once necessary and dangerous to the development of art in postwar West Germany. This was true in part because art had been a central rallying point for the National Socialists, who had used painting to identify what was good and what was bad in German culture. Nazi cultural politicians had articulated this evaluation through art objects themselves and at state-sponsored exhibitions, notably at the annual *Great German Art Exhibitions* in Munich and at their major pendant, the show of *Degenerate Art* in 1937.[49] The prominent role of the visual

[47] Theodor Heuss, Introductory essay in *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950. Erster Ausstellung Berlin 1951* (Berlin: Deutscher Künstlerbund, 1951), unpaginated.
[48] Heinz Lemke, "Vorwort," in *Documenta: Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts* (München: Prestel Verlag, 1955), 13.
[49] There is an extensive body of literature on the function of art in the Third Reich, but Eric Michaud's analysis of the formative role of art in National Socialism is especially insightful. Michaud argues that

arts in the reification of National Socialist ideas and the Nazi purge of modern art forced a postwar reevaluation of the history of *all* German art in the twentieth century. In West Germany, a recuperation of prewar modern art was necessary in order for postwar artistic production to flourish. At the same time, there was no comprehensive and instantaneous rejection of National Socialist art in the Federal Republic, and Nazi art's naturalistic and *völkisch* elements remained firmly embedded in certain types of West German contemporary art. In this chapter, I examine two examples from the early 1950s in which West Germans engaged the art politics of National Socialism. I compare the activity of an artists' organization, the Deutscher Künstlerbund (Federation of German Artists, hereafter the Künstlerbund), including the group's first postwar exhibition in Berlin in 1951, with *documenta. Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*documenta. Art of the Twentieth Century*, or *documenta*) in Kassel in 1955. For the artists, critics, and politicians involved in these two projects, reconciling various aspects of the German past after 1945 was part of a larger adjustment to the Cold War present. It was a prerequisite for the integration of the Federal Republic into the western European community.

In the above quotation from the foreword to the Künstlerbund's 1951 catalog, West German Federal President Theodor Heuss asserts that Germany's best artists had continued to produce important work during fascism, even when under great strain and while virtually invisible. Establishing the perseverance of German art in spite of Nazism was a primary goal of both the members of the Künstlerbund and the organizers of *documenta*. Both set out to reclaim German art from National Socialism so that (West)

National Socialist art did not simply illustrate the ideas of National Socialism, but also embodied them, creating a mythic history and present in which Nazism's cultural goals were accomplished before they had been accomplished by human work. Eric Michaud, The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany, trans. Janet Lloyd (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004)

German art would be free to advance into the democratic present. Expressionism offered these artists and curators a positive history that preceded National Socialism altogether.[50] In the early 1950s, internationally and in West Germany in particular, Expressionism remained twentieth-century German art's most influential movement, a privileged position made more valuable because of the Nazi purge of Expressionist art in the 1930s. Additionally, because of its repeated characterization in the early twentieth century by supporters and detractors alike as inherently and authentically "Germanic," Expressionism became a useful reference point in the creation of a lineage for contemporary German art in the 1950s.

Both the Künstlerbund's 1951 exhibition and the first *documenta* in 1955 were significant public events. However, my comparison is not limited strictly to the exhibitions themselves. In particular, my examination of the Künstlerbund takes into account not just the 1951 exhibition and its subsequent reception in the West German press, but also the organization's activities outside of this show. I describe the Künstlerbund in a comprehensive way, as it operated over several years, rather than as it represented itself in the single, isolated moment of an exhibition. In contrast, my study of *documenta* is more limited in scope, focused largely on the intentions articulated by its organizers and the details of its installation. The extensive photographic evidence and floor plans which remain of that exhibition allow a close study not possible in the

[50] I will argue this in spite of the fact that Expressionism was a special point of contention within the aesthetic politics of National Socialism. Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda and Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi ideologue and founder of the Combat League for German Culture, had conflicting ideas about Expressionism. Goebbels was a proponent of certain German Expressionist artists, especially Emil Nolde and Ernst Barlach, while Rosenberg demanded that German art in National Socialism be naturalistically representational. Although Goebbels ultimately won the struggle to control culture in the Third Reich, he first had to convert to Rosenberg's aesthetic standards and largely relinquish his support of German Expressionism. Nevertheless, Goebbels' promotion even of certain Expressionist artists left the movement tainted. See Neli Levi, "'Judge for Yourselves!'- The 'Degenerate Art' Exhibition as Political Spectacle," *October*, vol. 85 (Summer, 1998), 41-64.

Künstlerbund case, and thus I deal with *documenta's* layout, content, and reception. Yet in spite of the differences in the archival record of these two examples and my subsequent framing of them, the comparison is sorely needed. Scholars generally treat *documenta* as an isolated event without precedent in Germany. Setting *documenta* opposite the Künstlerbund's first exhibition and its larger work emphasizes that, in the exhibition itself as well as in its reception, *documenta's* interpretation of the German past would not have been possible without the foundations established by the earlier Künstlerbund show and the group's other public activities. Without an analogue like the Künstlerbund to evaluate it against, the goals and consequences of *documenta* remain indistinct.[51]

Together these two exhibitions provide a glimpse into the wide variety of artistic production present in West Germany in the first part of the 1950s, when modern artists worked in styles ranging from expressive forms of figuration based in early twentieth-century Expressionism, to more radical forms of total abstraction. While a range of styles coexisted early in the decade, my comparsion of the two shows demonstrates that there was an underlying tension between the more figurative and the more abstract artworks which shared wall and floor space at both the Künstlerbund show and at *documenta*.[52]

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[51] The literature on the first *documenta* is substantial. See especially Walter Grasskamp, *Die unbewältigte Moderne: Kunst und Öffentlichkeit* (München: C. H. Beck, 1989); Walter Grasskamp, "For Example, Documenta, or, How is Art History Produced," in Reesa Greenberg, et al., eds., *Thinking about Exhibitions* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 67-78; Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel, *documenta 1955. Erste Internationale Kunstausstellung - eine fotografische Rekonstruktion* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995). Ulrike Wollenhaupt-Schmidt, *documenta 1955. Eine Ausstellung im Spannungsfeld der Auseinandersetzungen um die Kunst der Avantgarde 1945-1960* (Frankfurt a. M. u.a.: Lang, 1994). See also Harald Kimpel, *documenta: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Köln: DuMont, 1997).

[52] In much of the scholarship on the dominance of abstraction in West Germany, the process through which abstraction became the preferred mode of painting is abbreviated, to the detriment of the author's argument. For example, Jost Hermand emphasizes the demonization of figurative painters for their apparent Communist sympathies. But Hermand's reduction of the process to anti-Communist politics ignores the politics of history, which greatly shaped what style could be tenable in the postwar context. Martin Damus describes an excelerated process by which the shift to total abstraction was completed by the middle of the

Stylistic variety was written into the very constitution of the Künstlerbund and was part of its definition of contemporary art, whereas at *documenta* the contrast between figurative styles and abstract styles became a means with which the curators distinguished between the art of the past and that of the present, respectively. I will argue that this change from the many styles of the Künstlerbund to the predominance of a single style at *documenta* was an outgrowth of a changed understanding of the past. As Heinz Lemke put it in his preface to the show's catalog, *documenta* was evidence that, by 1955, West Germans were no longer trapped "in an affectionate reminiscence" but had become "open for the 'truth' of the present."

PART I. THE KÜNSTLERBUND AS LIVING HISTORY

At the time of its 1951 exhibition, the Deutscher Künstlerbund was an organization with a tradition dating to the beginning of the twentieth century. Founded in Weimar in 1903, the Künstlerbund was the idea of the publisher and arts advocate Harry Graf Kessler, who sought a means of unifying Germany's modern artists into an effective public presence. In its original form, the Künstlerbund was a protest against the Wilhelmine government's repression of artists through a state-controlled art market. But it also described its mission as "securing artistic freedom and the tolerance of different artistic styles, while promoting young artists."[53] This insistence on the artist's freedom

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1950s, but he does not cite specific events (exhibitions, important reviews) at which that shift ocurred. See Jost Hermand, "Freiheit im Kalten Krieg," in Hugo Borger, Ekkehard Mai, and Stephan Waetzoldt eds., '*45 und die Folgen. Kunstgeschichte eines Wiederbeginns* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie, 1991), 142, and Martin Damus, "Moderne Kunst in Westdeutschland 1945-1959," in Gerda Breuer, *Die Zähmung der Avantgarde: zur Rezeption der Moderne in den 50er Jahren* (Basel: Stroemfeld Verlag, 1997), 39.

[53] Among its original members were the artists Lovis Corinth, Max Liebermann, and Max Slevogt. "Der deutsche Künstlerbund im Überblick," Internationale Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 23. January 2002, http://www.igbk.de/german/dkb.htm (18. October 2003).

brought the original Künstlerbund into conflict with National Socialism.[54] 1936, the year of the Berlin Olympics, was also the year the last exhibition of the original Künstlerbund took place in Hamburg. By 1936 the Nazi clampdown on modern art was gaining momentum, and many of the Künstlerbund's members had already been censured.[55] The exhibition, which had initially been approved by the Reich Chamber of Culture, included work by a number of well-known artists whom the Nazis had already stripped of their right to exhibit, including Otto Dix, Karl Hofer, and Alexej von Jawlensky. Exhibiting these artists was a defiant move that did not escape the notice of Nazi bureaucrats, and the show was closed down by the Reich Chamber ten days after it opened.[56] A few months later, the Künstlerbund's president, the sculptor Georg Kolbe, received word from the Reich Chamber that the organization was being dissolved because it "demonstrated a lack of responsibility to the *Volk* and the *Reich*."[57]

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[54] Marianne Lyra-Wex notes that most of the Künstlerbund artists were able to remain in Germany and continue working, to varying degrees, during the Third Reich. She thus suggests that the Künstlerbund is proof of continuity between pre- and postwar German art. But the repression of the National Socialist period must have had an impact on the cohesion of the avant-garde in Germany. Künstlerbund members were "invited" to join the Reich Chamber of Culture after the group was dissolved in 1936; I don't know whether any did, but if so then they would not have suffered as much as those who didn't. Conversely, they would not have been readily accepted by their former colleagues in 1950. See Marianne Lyra-Wex, "Wiedergründung und Neubeginn nach 1945," in Uwe Rüth et al., eds., *Aufbruch 51: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion* (Stadt Herne: Herne, 1982), 6.

[55] In the exhibition catalog, the organizers reached out to the "guests of the XI Olympiad" in an attempt to draw international attention to the plight of modern art under National Socialism. Marianne Lyra-Wex has suggested that the show was planned to coincided with the Olympics not only to raise awareness of the Künstlerbund's modern art practice, but also because the threat of negative publicity would discourage state intervention. But it is unlikely that Nazi officials would allow a group of artists to embarrass it during an international spectacle; even if the Künstlerbund did plan to hide behind the Olympic spotlight, I doubt that the group expected the 1936 show to go unnoticed by the authorities. Instead it may have been a final, staged provocation by the German avant-garde. See Marianne Lyra-Wex, "Die Ausstellung des Deutschen Künstlerbundes im Hamburger Kunstverein 1936," in *1936 Verbotene Bilder*, Siegfried Neuenhausen and Marianne Lyra-Wex eds. (Berlin: Deutscher Künstlerbund e.V., 1986), 17.

[56] Lyra-Wex notes that the show was visited and approved eight days before it opened by Nazi officials (Ibid., 17).

[57] Siegfried Neuenhausen, "Zur Ausstellung," in *1936 Verbotene Bilder*, Siegfried Neuenhausen and Marianne Lyra-Wex ed. (Berlin: Deutscher Künstlerbund e.V., 1986), 6.

The National Socialists' closure of the 1936 show and subsequent disbanding of the Künstlerbund provided the organization with a special pedigree in the postwar period.[58] Its restoration signaled a return to modernism in Germany and a definitive break with the art politics of the Nazi period. In early 1947 the journal *Das Kunstwerk* looked to the Künstlerbund to act as "an artists' organization independent of public authorities and parties" and a "gathering [of] progressive forces."[59] Due to zonal licensing requirements, the group was initially permitted only in Berlin, but this was a temporary condition; the Künstlerbund was publicly active even before it was incorporated nationally in 1950, representing Germany at the Venice Biennale in 1948.[60] As *Das Kunstwerk* reported, numerous artists, including the organization's president Karl Hofer, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Max Pechstein, showed work in the still-ruined German pavilion.[61] The Künstlerbund's members took a crucial first step in Venice toward returning German art to a wider public arena.

The Künstlerbund's participation in the Biennale proved that modern art had survived German fascism. In the early 1950s, the Künstlerbund continued to use its unique ties to the German art that predated National Socialism to create a usable lineage for contemporary West German art. At its most basic, this required the executive board, led by Karl Hofer, to locate former members and to reestablish a network that had been badly damaged by the Nazi regime and the war. In 1950, the board invited 81 former

[58] Lyra-Wex says its status as victim made the group "gesellschaftsfähig," or presentable, by which I understand her to mean that the Künstlerbund became more mainstream after the war. But even if the postwar Künstlerbund was not radical in the same sense as it had been in the 1910s, it was not content with the status quo in West Germany in the 1950s, as I discuss below. Lyra-Wex, "Der Deutsche Künstlerbund—Wiedergründung und Neubeginn nach 1945," in *Aufbruch '51. Versuch einer Rekonstruktion* (Emschertal-Museum, Herne et al: Bochum, 1989), 5.
[59] *Das Kunstwerk* 1, no.6 (1946/47): 46.
[60] Marianne Lyra-Wex, "Der Deutsche Künstlerbund—Wiedergründung und Neubeginn nach 1945," 4.
[61] "Der Deutsche Künstlerbund auf der diesjährigen Biennale," *Das Kunstwerk* 2, no. 5/6 (1948): 85.

members to renew their membership.[62] Members who were currently living in the German Democratic Republic were not invited to join, but this was a complication of the political situation and not part of the Künstlerbund's plan. On the contrary, the historical continuity which the Künstlerbund had made its goal required a "*Gesamtdeutsche,*" or all-German, approach, and like many Germans at the time, the Künstlerbund's board hoped that the division of Germany would be temporary and that East German artists would one day be permitted to become members. In spite of Germany's continued division, artists from the GDR did participate in the Künstlerbund's annual exhibitions beginning in 1952.[63]

In addition to reconstructing much of its pre-1936 membership, the postwar Künstlerbund used the language of its original founders to define itself according to a "good" German history. The 1951 catalog includes extensive excerpts from essays written by Harry Graf Kessler, the patron of the original Künstlerbund, in the first decade of the twentieth century. In one fragment, Kessler asserts that, "in art, only the exception is of value; not diligence, not attitude, not style: only character. Everything else is

[62] The 81 artists included 51 painters, 22 sculptors, and 8 printmakers. I cannot state how the board chose its new members, but it seems to have been a selective process; several angry letters are preserved in the Künstlerbund archive from artists who were not invited to re-join in 1951. A letter from Gabriele Münter dated 1.2.1951 (Künstlerbund Archive, DKB 11) suggests that initially, the board either chose not or forgot to invite her, even though she was a former member and a well-known painter. The board invited her to join after the membership had already been constituted. Münter responded coolly to the late invitation, but did join. Indeed, she is one of eight artists chosen to contribute a statement for the first catalog (1951). Considering that the other seven artists quoted there were quite prominent (Baumeister, Nay, Winter), the Künstlerbund had either reassessed Münter's importance or, as I suspect, did so in apology.

[63] A current register of all participating artists available at the Künstlerbund's website lists numerous East German participants in the 1950s. See Deutscher Künstlerbund, Register, no date, <http://www.kuenstlerbund.de/pdf/register.pdf> (7. July 2004). For example: Joseph Hegenbarth, a printmaker based in Dresden, showed with the Künstlerbund every year from 1952 to 1964 (except in 1962) and was a member in spite of the fact that he lived in the GDR. Hermann Bachmann, a painter based in Halle, showed at the 1952 exhibition, prior to his emigration in 1953; his fellow Halle painter Herbert Kitzel showed five times before emigrating in 1958. Willi Sitte and Fritz Rübbert, also working in Halle in 1952, wrote to voice their displeasure at being rejected from that year's show, in spite of the "considerable risk" that their submission had entailed; see SAdK Deutscher Künstlerbund 10/1952. The constructivist painter Hermann Glöckner, also an East German member, was included in the 1957 show in Berlin, as was Ernst Hassebrauk, a Dresden printmaker. See SAdK Deutscher Künstlerbund 31/1956-7.

[worth]…nothing and has no right to be treated or exhibited as if it were something of consequence." In another excerpt, Kessler writes that the Künstlerbund counteracts "the human tendency to eliminate 'individuality' in art in order to make room for the sundry others."[64] In 1951 these sentiments, originally a reaction against the conservative Wilhelmine academy, were a means of recalibrating the German public's opinions on art after National Socialism, which had enforced a unified aesthetic in German art production. Kessler's emphasis on artistic freedom and quality became the driving principle behind Karl Hofer's leadership of the Künstlerbund in the early 1950s. By citing Kessler, the Künstlerbund emphasized both its own continuity and the relevance of the goals of the original Künstlerbund to Germany in the wake of National Socialism.

Hofer and the board of directors had concrete suggestions regarding how to put these principles into effect in West Germany. First and foremost, the board recommended that the Künstlerbund serve the state as a "central entity, recognized as solely responsible for essential questions pertaining to the visual arts," a proposition which was an explicit reversal of National Socialist policy, in which the tasks of the artist were prescribed by the state.[65] And, in the context of the increasing tension I have described above between proponents of figurative and abstract styles, the Künstlerbund stressed that its neutrality in matters of style was a powerful argument for its leadership role in national art: "We believe that the composition of our board and of the jury provides a guarantee that no one-sided tendencies will prevail. We stress explicitly that the Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950 neither favors nor represents any style within contemporary German art. Just as it

[64] Harry Graf Kessler, "Der deutsche Künstlerbund," originally 1904; reprinted in *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950. Erster Ausstellung Berlin 1951* (Berlin: Deutscher Künstlerbund, 1951), unpaginated.
[65] Ernst Reuter, the mayor of Berlin at the time of the 1951 show, encouraged the Künstlerbund to pursue this goal in his catalog essay. See *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950. Erster Ausstellung Berlin 1951* (Berlin: Deutscher Künstlerbund, 1951), unpaginated.

determines membership solely by the artistic quality of an artist's work, in all other matters the Künstlerbund does not represent the interests of any one style."[66]

At the same time, the Künstlerbund asserted that, whatever its style, the work its members produced need not be "comprehended by the general public" in order to be valuable.[67] This is another refutation of the National Socialist insistence that art be naturalistic, and that "[t]he only true art," as Hermann Göring put it in 1936, "is that which the ordinary man can understand."[68] The continuing frequency of this demand for naturalistic art is substantiated by the rhetoric used by one of the sponsors of the 1952 exhibition *Iron and Steel*, the subject of Chapter Two, who insisted that his workers were "sensitive to nature" and did not understand "modern" (i.e. abstract) art.[69] Pressing for their own involvement in the public funding of visual art, the Künstlerbund authors draw attention to the prevalence of such conservative attitudes not among the general public, but in the rhetoric of public officials. In the introduction to the Künstlerbund's 1951 catalog, the executive board objects to the German state's tendency to sponsor works made in a traditional or conservative manner, rather than in innovative ways: "Commissions of an artist who breaks new ground in art are rare. In all matters concerning art, bureaucracy is inclined to follow the taste and judgment of the mainstream."[70] In the aftermath of National Socialism, this conservative approached suggested that various government officials in the Federal Republic were still under the sway of Nazi aesthetics. As the Künstlerbund declared elsewhere, in spite of the Allies'

[66] "Aufgaben und Ziele," in *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950*, unpaginated.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Hermann Göring at the exhibition *In Praise of Work,* 1936. Quoted in Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 96.
[69] "Ein roter Klecks." *Der Spiegel*, 7.5.52: 32.
[70] "Aufgaben und Ziele," *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950*, unpaginated.

efforts to the contrary, prevailing attitudes in West Germany were irrefutable proof that "art cannot be denazified."[71]

When the Künstlerbund broached the issue of art and the state in 1951, it was not simply to remind West Germans of the authoritarian tactics of the Nazis. Instead it was an attempt to raise awareness of the political situation of Cold-War Germany, and the group's critiques implicate East and West equally. The Künstlerbund pledged to "defend the freedom of the arts wherever and against whomever necessary," and to "tirelessly combat…growing reactionary tendencies from both the right and the left in certain parts of our nation."[72] Here the Künstlerbund relativizes the conservative art politics of socialist East Germany by implying a similarity between the East German state's campaign against modern art and the persistence of National Socialist aesthetics in the Federal Republic.[73] In the eyes of the Künstlerbund's board, West Germany was just as much in danger of returning to authoritarian control of art as East Germany. Throughout the early 1950s, the West German press reported numerous cases from around the country indicating that the Künstlerbund's worries were not unfounded. In one such example from 1952, a visitor at an exhibition of the work of Franz Marc in Wolfsburg complained, "But this is just that alien [*artfremd*], un-German Expressionism…that's degenerate art!"[74] Ideas about modern art that had been propagated in National Socialism,

[71] This is a reference to the process of denazification, the Allied purge of National Socialist party members and bureaucrats in the late 1940s and first years of the 1950s, which I address in some detail in Chapter Two. Deutscher Künstlerbund, Typewritten manuscript, November 1951. SAdK Deutscher Künstlerbund 8.
[72] The essay uses "unseres Landes," which, given the KB's strong all-German attitude, I take to mean Germany as a single nation. "Aufgaben und Ziele," *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950*, unpaginated.
[73] "Aufgaben und Ziele," *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950*, unpaginated. As I discuss in Chapter Three, in East Germany the ongoing popularity of Nazi-type naturalistic painting was a real problem, as well, in spite of the GDR's antifascist foundations.
[74] See Katja Widmann, "'Eine Gemäldeausstellung in dieser Arbeiterstadt?' Kunst in den Aufbaujahren Wolfsburgs und Stalinstadts," in *Aufbau West, Aufbau Ost. Die Planstädte Wolfsburg und Eisenhüttenstadt in der Nachkriegszeit* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1997), 22. March 2000,

expressed through the same vocabulary, continued to be widespread among the general population of West Germany.[75]

Under the leadership of Karl Hofer, the Künstlerbund actively tried to change the course of West German politics by targeting reactionary attitudes toward art at the level of city and state government, particularly when public funds were at stake.[76] One such incident in December 1951 involved the Bavarian Ministry of Culture's exhibition of the so-called Gerhardinger Group. The show was organized by Constantin Gerhardinger, a painter who had once enjoyed the patronage of the National Socialists, before receiving *Malverbot*, a painting ban, when he fell out of favor with a regional Nazi official in 1943.[77] But, like other artists who participated in the 1951 show in Munich, Gerhardinger had repeatedly exhibited at the Nazis' yearly *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in Munich prior to his censure. Though not necessarily proof of Party membership, their repeated participation in the major Nazi exhibition was an indication, for the

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<http://dhme.dhm.de/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg35.htm> (19. December 2002). The article that recorded these responses in the Wolfsburg newspaper was severe in its condemnation of this kind of attitude, but concluded that more effort was needed to counteract the twelve years of indoctrination that had formed the public's opinion of modern art.

[75] The Künstlerbund was not alone in this critique of the Federal Republic; the writer Alfred Kantorowicz concluded in 1950 that the "dream of the regeneration of Germany is at an end" and that "thinkers and poets, every sort of intellectually creative person, are all out in the cold" (quoted in Stephen Brockmann, "German Culture at the 'Zero Hour'," in Stephen Brockmann and Frank Trommler eds., *Revisiting Zero Hour 1945: The Emergence of Postwar German Culture* (Washington, DC: The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1996), 34). By the beginning of the 1950s many West German intellectuals felt that Germany had missed a chance to move beyond its authoritarian past and to create a genuinely new nation. The most well-known (and best represented in the scholarship) of these critics were the writers of the *Gruppe 47*. For an excellent and extensive discussion of postwar literature and the politics of German reconstruction, see Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004).

[76] Kirsten Muhle concludes that Hofer's melancholy personality was the result of an inability to change his situation. Nevertheless, Hofer's activities in the Künstlerbund and his constant defense of himself in the press instead confirm that he was continually involved with altering the status quo, even if he was not always successful. See Kirsten Muhle, *Karl Hofer (1878-1955): Untersuchungen zur Werksturktur* (Köln: Lohmar, 2000), 256, note 24.

[77] See Fischer-Defoy, *Ich habe das Meine gesagt!* 192, and Mortimer G. Davidson, ed., *Kunst in Deutschland, 1933-1945: eine wissenschaftliche Enzyklopädie der Kunst im Dritten Reich* (Tübingen: Grabert, 1991), 2/1: 298.

Künstlerbund and other observers, that these artists had profited from the Nazi system. In a response to the Künstlerbund's persistent protests against the Gerhardinger exhibition, the Bavarian Minister of Culture defended the show to the Bavarian parliament with the startling argument: "We can't forbid pictures simply because they once enjoyed the favor of a few great Nazis."[78] But in the end, the Künstlerbund's complaints did force the Bavarian government to retract the purchases it had made from the show. In a public response to the conflict, the Künstlerbund warned that state sponsorship which ignored the complicity of artists like Gerhardinger in the Third Reich indicated lingering National Socialist sympathies. The Künstlerbund worried that these reactionary attitudes were able to flourish in the climate of Cold War hysteria which seized West Germany, where, the authors observed, "We stare, hypnotized, at the bear in the East, without noticing that the hyenas are attacking from behind."[79]

In 1952, the Künstlerbund published in a similar critique of an exhibition in the state of Baden-Württemberg. At the show's opening, the state Minister of Culture Gotthilf Schenkel bemoaned contemporary art's lack of respect towards the old masters and claimed that artists blatantly disregarded nature and "higher law." While the minister employed the conservative, pseudo-religious terminology invoked in the postwar humanist discourse by Hans Sedlmayr in the late 1940s, his remarks unmistakably recalled National Socialist concepts, as well.[80] "Today, what is known as modern art" he complained, "is nowhere near making a connection with the healthy sensibilities of the

[78] See Carl Linfert, transcript of radio address on 21.12.1952 (Archive of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, file Hartung, Karl I,B – 19a).
[79] Fischer-Defoy, *Ich habe das Meine gesagt!* 192.
[80] Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1948).

Volk."[81] Most discussions of art reception in the 1950s referred to the audience as *das Publikum*, the public; Schenkel's use of the term *das Volk* lent his speech a reactionary tone. The minister likewise echoed Nazi rhetoric when he stressed that depicting a human being other than "as he actually is" would yield an "unnatural" image. Remarkably, when he even went so far as to express his frustration with what he called the "grimaces" of modern art and asserting that the public wanted to see pictures that "normal people would identify as normal."[82] This rhetoric could have been lifted straight from the walls of the Nazis' *Degenerate Art* exhibition.

Schenkel's remarks provoked reaction from the Federal Republic's modern artists and sympathetic critics because of their resemblance to German fascist rhetoric. Ludwig Zahn, editor of the journal *Das Kunstwerk*, summarized Schenkel's attitude in a scathing editorial: "On the one side, the side of evil, stand the ice-cold intellectuals and decadent aesthetes; on the other side, the good side, stands 'the healthy, untainted, naïve *Volk*'—we know this fanatical, black and white scheme. It leads directly to Munich's House of German Art."[83] In November 1952, the Künstlerbund, too, responded to the Minister's speech. In a letter sent directly to Schenkel and subsequently published in West German newspapers, the organization warned the minister that he was "playing the game of art-phobic neo-fascism." Schenkel, the letter continued, echoed the "opinions of the clueless masses who were won over by Hitler for the miserable art of the Third

[81] "Das gesunde Volksempfinden" was a standard expression in Nazi rhetoric referring to the supposed majority public opinion which preferred naturalistic artworks. In Zahn's editorial (see footnote x below) his quote reads "das gesunde Lebenswillen des Volkes;" Zahn emphasizes the similarity between that idea and "gesunde Volksempfinden." Whichever phrasing is accurate, the idea is certainly the same.
[82] Transcript of the report broadcast on the Süddeutschen Rundfunks Stuttgart, no date. (Archive of Fine Arts, Germanisches National Museum Nürnberg, File Redslob IB 277).
[83] Leopold Zahn, "Ist es schon wieder so weit?" in *Das Kunstwerk*, Heft 5 1952 pp 1-2.

Reich," opinions shared by "today's eastern ideologues."[84] This last remark comparing Schenkel's vocabulary to the official terminology of the GDR serves two purposes: it equates the minister with the "enemy" in the East, and it reiterates the Künstlerbund's own mission, which is to protect German art from any political attack, regardless of the affiliation of the attacker. Through this comparison, the authors try to make the public aware of the similarities between reactionary behavior in East and West Germany.

In another, similar case in 1953, the Künstlerbund publicly criticized the city government of Darmstadt for hosting an exhibition organized, according to the Künstlerbund's sources, with the help of the Munich Gerhardinger Group. Like the 1951 Munich show, this exhibition included several artists with National Socialist affiliations; to its critics, the show was especially problematic because of its dedication to the late Adolf Bühler, a painter known for having organized an early show of degenerate art in the 1930s.[85] Putting into practice the executive board's 1951 pledge "to protect the freedom of the arts wherever and against whomever necessary," the Künstlerbund intervened with the Darmstadt case, as it had in the previous incidents in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, because elected officials and government money were involved.[86] Bringing these examples of what it considered to be a reactionary continuity to the public's attention was a central part of the Künstlerbund's activity in the early 1950s. After its own persecution by the National Socialists, the group sought to prevent a similar limitation of artistic freedom from gaining hold again in Germany.[87]

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[84] Letter (photocopy) from Deutscher Künstlerbund to Schenkel, 11.11.52 (Archive of Fine Arts, Germanisches National Museum Nürnberg, File Redslob, IB 277).
[85] "Protest," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 7. May 1953. See also Fischer-Defoy, *Ich habe das Meine gesagt!* 193.
[86] "Aufgaben und Ziele," *Deutscher Künstlerbund 1950*, unpaginated.
[87] Although it is chiefly concerned with art politics during the National Socialist period, Jonathan Petropoulos' *The Faustian Bargain. The Art World in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press,

Continuity versus Rupture

Just as the Künstlerbund saw vestiges of the National Socialist past in postwar society, the West German public also saw the past manifest in the Künstlerbund. Reviewers praised the inaugural 1951 show as the first assessment of contemporary German art since the war. But it was the Künstlerbund's link to pre-war Germany, embodied in particular by older members who had suffered during National Socialism, that distinguished the exhibition, and this play between old and new created a distinct tension in the reception of the show.[88] While the regeneration of the Künstlerbund provided a positive history of German art, it also threatened to keep contemporary artistic production tied to that past.

At the Künstlerbund's first exhibition in Berlin in 1951, the first prize in painting was awarded to Karl Hofer for his work *Karnevalsabend* (*Carnival Evening*) from 1951 [Fig. 1.1]. The second prize in painting went to Fritz Winter's *Vor der Glut* (*Before the Embers*), also from 1951 [Fig. 1.2]. In the critical reception of the Künstlerbund show, expressive representational work like Hofer's and total abstraction like Winter's came to represent old and new German art, respectively. Like much of Hofer's postwar painting, *Karnevalabend* [see Fig. 1.1] is a composition which emphasizes the melancholy and ominous aspects of its subject. Traditionally, Carnival is an opportunity for masquerade and playful transgression, but Hofer's picture ignores the festive aspects of the holiday and emphasizes its artificiality. In the narrow street, the figures appear disproportionately large. This odd scale, together with the bright colors and backward swell of the houses,

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2000) provides an excellent overview of the problems of rehabilitating Nazi art professionals, including art historians, curators, and artists, in the 1950s.

[88] "Contemporary German art" in these reviews is understood to mean *West* German art. Very few of the reviewers echoed the Künstlerbund's hopes for one day including East German artists in its shows.

evokes the shallow space of a stage set. The figures' faces are obscured by flat, angular masks which merge imperceptibly with the rest of their bodies. Their bodies in turn are hidden behind stiffly-rendered clothing and are reduced to simple cones with limbs. Overall, the scene, which could be a happy one, is uncanny and disturbing.

The expressive figuration of Hofer's work had its counterpoint in Winter's total abstraction. The title of Winter's award-winning work, *Before the Embers* [see Fig. 1.2], suggests the viewer is gazing into a dying fire, and although the image is not representational, the shifting forms, which are alternately transparent and thickly opaque, and the contrasting qualities of these shapes create an impression of movement. Winter was already working in this emphatically abstract style in the 1930s and 1940s; by the 1950s his stylistic vocabulary was well developed, and *Before the Embers* is typical of the artist's work from that time.[89] In contrast to Hofer's eerie, expressive figurative pictures, Winter's abstractions create associations through form and color using heavily textured, collage-like elements.

These two very different works by Hofer and Winter epitomized the wide variety of modes of painting united within the postwar Deutscher Künstlerbund. Hofer, the older of the two artists, had matured as an artist in the early twentieth century and had been a prominent academic artist before National Socialism. Winter, who was thirty years younger, had been a student of Paul Klee and, by the 1950s, provided a stylistically mature model for the growing number of West German artists who were exploring total abstraction. Like the Künstlerbund as a whole, both artists had been persecuted by the National Socialists and as a result were by observers as being "unburdened" with

[89] See Gabriele Lohberg, *Fritz Winter. Leben und Werk. Mit Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und einem Anhang der sonstigen Techniken* (München: Bruckmann, 1986).

ideological baggage in the postwar context, even though Winter had been drafted into the army in 1939 and spent four years as a Soviet prisoner of war.

But the connection to the past and the apparent authenticiy which Hofer, Winter, and the other surviving Künstlerbund artists provided was not without its pitfalls. Will Grohmann, an established authority on German modern art of the early twentieth century and West Germany's foremost art critic, identifies this tension in his three-part analysis of the 1951 exhibition.[90] He writes that "[w]hat was authentic [in the original Künstlerbund] continued to develop in the younger artists, [who are] now producing very German utterances—even if those are not always persuasively contemporary." In fact, in Grohmann's opinion, "shortcomings were part of the show's overall character." But he reasons that, "[i]f art provides us with a diagnosis of the times, then these days it cannot produce only shining examples." In other words, only six years after the war, West Germany was still on the mend. The instability of the postwar years was necessarily reflected in the range of success of the works shown by the Künstlerbund.

Grohmann is generally positive about the Künstlerbund becoming active again, but he warns against the group's tendency to exhibit art that is stylistically similar to pre-war art.[91] The Künstlerbund show could never travel to Paris or New York, he writes, because, after the deaths of Klee and Beckmann, German art is no longer internationally relevant, and the "German Expressionism" he sees dominating the Künstlerbund show "has no chance in other countries." This type of painting, Grohmann asserts, suffers from "too many regressive relationships [which exist] on a level that is no longer [timely]."[92]

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[90] Will Grohmann, "Die Representation der Deutschen. Erste Ausstellung des 'Deutschen Künstlerbundes 1950', Berlin," *Die Neue Zeitung Berliner Blatt* 2. August 1951.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Will Grohmann "Teil II. Die Regie," *Die neue Zeitung* 3. August 1951.

As a particular example of this regressive, expressionist-type style, Grohmann cites the work of Ernst Schumacher, whose painting *Frühlingsabend* (*Spring Evening*) won third prize at the show.[93] *Spring Evening* was not reproduced in the exhibition catalog, but the reproduction of Schumacher's *Einsames Haus* (*Lonely House*) [Fig. 1.3] allows a consideration of the formal characteristics and stylistic affiliations that concerned Grohmann. Although the black and white image prevents me from discussing color, the subject, composition, and brushwork on their own provide insight into the critic's objections.[94] The composition, a landscape, is divided into symmetrical halves by a rectangular house and a grove of trees. In the foreground, two large rocks indicate spatial recession and, like the trees, emphasize the artist's planar approach to modeling. The artist's method, in which surfaces are broken into different tonalities and planes of color represent volume, is indebted to Cezanne, although his use of choppy strokes to provide texture in the trees, on the ground, and on the house recalls the brushwork of Expressionists like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner or Otto Mueller.

Schumacher's painting emphasizes volume and surface. Combined with expressive line (and, based on other works of Schumacher's, I assume this is true for color as well), these formal characteristics made Schumacher's paintings reminiscent of Expressionist artistic production in Germany in the first two decades of the twentieth century. For Will Grohmann, a painting like Schumacher's did not have the radical

[93] Grohmann was also a member of the jury, along with Free University Dean Edwin Redslob and the art historian Paul Ortwin Rave. (Letter from Eberhard Seel to Fritz Winter, undated, SAdK, Deutscher Künstlerbund 8).

[94] Unfortunately, I have been unable to find either of these pictures reproduced elsewhere, neither in color nor in black and white, and in general there is little information available on Ernst Schumacher. I have located one exhibition catalog which covers his entire career but includes few works from the early 1950s. This makes a fuller discussion very difficult, but the fact that he won a prize at the 1951 show implies that he was at least moderately successful at the time and that his work embodied something significant, at least to some of the Künstlerbund's jurors.

charge in 1951 that it might have had thirty or forty years earlier. Grohmann unequivocally asserts in his review that expressive figurative methods like Schumacher's could never be successful at an international level. Instead, Grohmann writes, the best work in the Künstlerbund show was not figurative, but abstract, pictures in which the artists represented not surface, volume, and other aspects of "reality's outward appearances," but "its backgrounds, [unseen] forces, and relationships…" The art Grohmann praises "expresses itself in allegories, and because of this no longer finds the appearance of things sufficient."[95] Fritz Winter's *Before the Embers* [see Fig. 1.2] might be an example of this kind of allegorical representation, because it alludes to reality rather that representing it in a figurative way.

Like Grohmann, most reviewers of the Künstlerbund exhibition addressed the tension between expressive figurative works like Hofer's *Carnival Evening* or Schumacher's *Lonely House*, and fully abstract works like Winter's *Before the Embers*. Indeed, for many observers the friction between figurative and abstract was the defining characteristic of the show, which, as one critic put it, tried to "enliven the autonomous form of the abstractionists with the spiritual fulfillment of the Expressionists, but on the other hand to tighten the excessively subjective and to integrate [it with] reawakened formal laws."[96] Most of these reviews consider the integration of figurative and abstract styles to be evidence of older and newer German art converging, or the past informing the present.

[95] Will Grohmann "Teil II. Die Regie." The allegory that Grohmann is promoting here might have something in common with that described by Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* in 1928.
[96] ERU, "Originalität als Aufgabe," *Der Kurier* 6. August 1951.

Grohmann considered Expressionism a closed chapter in German art history. But Expressionism had been Germany's last major success in international modern art, and many other reviewers were eager to find remnants of that style in the Künstlerbund exhibition.[97] In a conflation typical for the reception of the 1951 show, one writer declares the expressive-figurative work of Karl Hofer, Gerhard Marcks, and a few other artists to be not only the best works in the show but also the most "German," and she in turn asserts that these works were more "successful" than those which tried to imitate Miró or Braque.[98] For another reviewer, the work of older artists, which was "formerly considered scandalous (*Bürgerschreck*), seem[ed] almost clarified and classical when hung between works of the younger generation."[99] For these observers, the expressive-figurative work of surviving Expressionist artists like Erich Heckel, Gabriele Münter, Max Pechstein, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff was an anchor within the exhibition. The Künstlerbund's Expressionist artists embodied the continuity of the organization as a whole. Their work was a reminder of past German successes in art and proof that those artists could still define German artmaking and, importantly, guide younger West German artists.[100]

But less optimistic reviewers asserted that younger artists were not learning from the Expressionists at all and that no new, authentically German art was being produced. A reviewer at the *Lübecker Nachrichten* wrote that the overwhelming amount of abstraction

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[97] The last major international show of German art before the war, the *Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art*, held at the New Burlington Galleries in London in 1938, primarily featured works by German Expressionists. The exhibition is generally noted in scholarship because Max Beckmann spoke at the show's opening. See *Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art* (London: New Burlington Galleries, 1938).

[98] Sabina Lietzmann, "Repräsentative Kunstschau in Berlin: Blütenbäume und Stahlvögel," *Bremer Nachrichten* 14. August 1951.

[99] Gerhard Wandel, "Für die Freiheit schöpferischer Geister," *Volksblatt*, 2. August 1951.

[100] Participating artists with ties to the Expressionist movement of the 1910s included Otto Dix, Gabriele Münter, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, and Gerhard Marcks.

at the Künstlerbund show proved that there were "no fertile descendents of 'Expressionism.'" Instead, the older style remained relegated to the status of historical curiosity, "'a German peculiarity,'" stuck in the pre-war world.[101] Another critic charged that the show favored a "too harshly filtered expressionist minority in favor of an overindulged 'abstract' majority," creating an unsuccessful juxtaposition of "'German inward-turning'…and a thin-blooded eclecticism with European ambitions."[102] These writers feared that there had not yet been a successful evolution of the Expressionist style in the postwar period. Rather than promoting a new, identifiably German style, the Künstlerbund exhibition revealed that Expressionism remained frozen in time while West Germany's younger artists were striving towards a more generic modernist mode with no specific national characteristics.[103] A third category of reviewers celebrated the prominence of total abstraction at the Künstlerbund show as tangible proof of West German artists' desire to rejoin the international (that is, western) modern art community. Even if the abstract works shown by younger artists at the exhibition did not demonstrate any particular innovation, these critics argue, artists were exercising the freedom, provided by the West German state, to work in any style they chose. In these analyses of the Künstlerbund exhibition, the tension between styles was evidence of a functioning democracy. And, as one reviewer writes, in the Federal Republic freedom was "granted not only to the artist but also to the critical viewer, who, even in response to formal approaches that are alien to him, must prove himself worthy of that freedom."[104]

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[101] Dr. Rolf Walther, "Deutsche Kunst auf der Waage," *Lübecker Nachrichten* 20. August 1951.
[102] ERU, "Originalität als Aufgabe."
[103] Although these statements resonate with a lightly nationalist tone, none of these critics was suggesting an isolationist or reactionary cultural policy; instead, they are promoting the idea of an identifiable German "brand," something which would be recognized on the international market as "German," as Expressionist work had once been.
[104] F.W.M., "Freiheit der Kunst," *Der Tag*, Berlin Edition, 2. August 1951.

The 1951 Künstlerbund show coincided exactly with the height of the so-called "formalism debate" in East Germany, during which the socialist government attempted to limit the styles in which artists could work.[105] Thus when West German critics praised the Künstlerbund for promoting abstraction, they also implicitly contrasted the situation in the Federal Republic with that in East Germany. In these reviews, abstract art becomes a marker of western liberal democracy and evidence of West Germany's membership in the democratic community of the West. Merely participating in the exhibition, one critic states, was proof of the artists' "determination to protect their intellectual independence and freedom.[106] In effect these reviewers argue that the Künstlerbund show is an advertisement of West German culture. The managing director of the Künstlerbund did observe that the 1951 show had reached a wide East German audience and that it was especially successful at attracting participants in the International Youth Festival, which was held concurrently in East Berlin.[107] However, this success was a surprise, and it had not been a goal of the show's organizers to attract the East German youth. By boasting of the exhibition's political value, the West German reviewers used the Künstlerbund to promote a West German cultural model.[108] In contrast, in both the 1951 catalog and in its various public interventions throughout the early 1950s, Karl Hofer and the Künstlerbund

[105] I discuss this extensively in Chapter Three. For the most exhaustive treatment of the "formalism debate," see Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus. Die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001).
[106] F.W.M., "Freiheit der Kunst," *Der Tag*, Berlin Edition, 2. August 1951.
[107] Letter from Eberhard Seel to Arthur Jung, 14.8.1951 (SAdK, Deutscher Künstlerbund, 9).
[108] Other reviewers saw the show as a leap forward for culture in Berlin, celebrating it as "a pivotal German event, [something] consistently denied us" (Albert Buesche, "Ein zentrales deutsches Erreignis," *Der Tagesspiegel* 2. August 1951). For these observers, the Künstlerbund exhibition was proof that the division of the West German state was not harming cultural life in the city of Berlin, which, due to its isolation within East Germany, "suffer[ed] under an inferiority complex that is unjustified…" (Eberhard Ruhmer, "Moderne Kunst in Berlin," *Der Kurier* 1. August 1951). Ironically, the Künstlerbund had originally hoped to hold its first postwar show in Hamburg in order to pick up, symbolically, where it had left off in 1938, but could never finalize the necessary arrangements. Berlin, in other words, was actually an emergency solution, rather than an intentional one. See Lyra-Wex, *Wiedergründung*, 5.

board argued firmly against the politicization of art. But the association between abstraction and new western democracy which took shape in the reception of the Künstlerbund show, along with the corresponding but opposed association between expressive figurative art and Germany's past, would be made incontrovertible at *documenta* four years later.

PART II. *DOCUMENTA'S* SELECTIVE HISTORY AND ITS POSTWAR CONSEQUENCES

The internal tension between figurative art and total abstraction within the Künstlerbund escalated with each annual exhibition. Largely on Karl Hofer's insistence, the executive board continued to endorse all modes of artistic production, a stance which increasingly irritated the group's more radically abstract painters. In 1954, Hofer and the critic Will Grohmann became involved in a prolonged dispute in the West Berlin press over the future of contemporary art in Germany. Hofer appeared increasingly antiquated in his views, which in turn reflected poorly on the Künstlerbund as a whole. Finally, in 1955, a popular magazine falsely quoted Hofer as saying that he had given up on abstract painting once he "realized how easy it is to do," and the Künstlerbund erupted in a major crisis.[109] West Germany's most respected abstract painters, Willi Baumeister, Fritz Winter, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, and Theodor Werner resigned from the Künstlerbund, citing not just Hofer's apparent personal disregard for abstraction but also the organization's archaic stylistic affiliations and subsequent lack of international relevance. Their resignation and the death of Karl Hofer a few months later effectively cost the Künstlerbund its role as an authority on the visual arts in West Germany.[110]

[109] The original article appeard in the women's magazine, *Constanze*, in October 1954. Quoted in Ulrike Wollenhaupt-Schmidt, *documenta1955*, 231.
[110] For a concise discussion of this debate, see Wollenhaupt-Schmidt, *documenta 1955*, 230-232.

But in the first years of the 1950s, the Künstlerbund had laid the foundation for the eventual success of abstraction and the artists who practiced it. By attacking reactionary attitudes and by insisting on the creative sovereignty of German artists, the Künstlerbund cleared a space for autonomous, modern artistic production in West Germany. The Künstlerbund exhibition of 1951 launched a public discussion of the relative importance of the expressive-figurative and abstract work produced by its members. These two earlier endeavors prepared West German audiences for *documenta's* authoritative definition of contemporary art in 1955.

In the introduction to the *documenta* catalog, Werner Haftmann wrote that show should be understood as "a broadly-based, initial attempt to renew international contact and to reenter a long-interrupted conversation here at home."[111] The exhibition was part retrospective and part contemporary showcase. Its organizers strove to assemble a representative sampling of pre-war modern art, with an emphasis on German production, and they combined this historical review with a survey of contemporary art in Western Europe. *documenta*'s eclectic narrative had a distinctly didactic undertone. As the organizers sought to reconnect West Germany with the international community, they hoped especially to reach a new generation of Germans: "[*documenta*] is intended for the maturing youth, for as yet unidentified painters, poets, thinkers, so that they might recognize the basis that was prepared for them and which they must maintain as well as surpass."[112] Identifying this lineage was important for encouraging West Germany's future artists, but, as I will demonstrate, it also symbolically redeemed postwar West

[111] Werner Haftmann, introduction to *Documenta: Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts* (München: Prestel Verlag, 1955), 23.
[112] Ibid., 25

Germans from Nazi crimes against modern art without ever really addressing National Socialism directly.[113]

Comparing *documenta* with the earlier Künstlerbund exhibitions exposes the tremendous change which the West German artworld underwent from 1950 to 1955. The Künstlerbund's early shows presented a window onto contemporary art as it unfolded and were not historical in scope.[114] At the same time, the participation of original Künstlerbund members was, in itself, a way of reaching back into Germany's past to construct a type of living history of German art.[115] In contrast, *documenta* was explicitly framed as a retrospective of "European art of the last fifty years." Although its high point was arguably a grand room featuring contemporary painting, *documenta's* overall emphasis was on creating an authoritative trajectory of German and European art from the early twentieth century to 1955. The two shows thus used two distinct approaches towards cataloging and codifying contemporary West German art, in particular in terms of the legacy of National Socialism. As I discuss below, the organizers of *documenta* relied on an oblique critique of Nazi art policy while simultaneously emphasizing Federal Republic's inclusion in the postwar culture of the West.

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[113] Walter Grasskamp has proposed that "*documenta* addressed a specifically German need, which it simultaneously aimed beyond; it unmistakeably positioned the demonstrative rehabilitation of modernism in the service of an ennobling of contemporary art, especially abstraction." See Grasskamp, "documenta – Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts. Internationale Ausstellung im Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, 15. Juli bis 18. September 1955," in *Die Kunst der Ausstellung. Eine Dokumentation dreißig exemplarischer Kunstausstellungen dieses Jahrhunderts*, eds. Bernd Klüser and Katharina Hegewisch (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1991), 116-125.

[114] Works shown by the Künstlerbund were supposed to be new and not previously shown elsewhere, but discrepancies between the dates on pictures and those listed in the catalog occasionally indicate that members sometimes ignored this rule.

[115] Only once in the 1950s did the Künstlerbund include works from foreign artists; the 1956 show had a separate Dutch and Belgian component. *Documenta*, in contrast, dealt specifically with German art history as well as with international relationships, both historical and contemporary.

Positioning Contemporary West German Art

As a center of airplane and tank manufacturing during the war, Kassel, the location of *documenta*, had been thoroughly bombed by the British in late 1943 and remained in a devastated state until nearly a decade after the end of the war.[116] By 1955 much of the city had been rebuilt, including the eighteenth-century Museum Fridericianum in the city center.[117] While structurally sound, the museum remained partially unfinished, a reminder of Kassel's near total destruction in the war. The Fridericianum has since become the centerpiece of every *documenta*, but in 1955 Arnold Bode and his co-organizers considered the museum to be a provisional venue.[118] It proved to be a favorable location for the show, however. One reviewer observed that the building had a pleasing contradictory quality, existing in disrepair yet possessing an improvised dignity: "Gutted, without doors, without windows until recently, with raw concrete floors and makeshift stairs; rooms of extraordinary size, compared to those usually available for art exhibitions; halls which retained, even in their decrepit state, something of the architectural, artistic atmosphere elicited by the original builder."[119] The duality of past and present preserved in the structure of the museum was a perfect representation of the dual nature of the exhibition inside it, as well.[120] The ruined

[116] An architectural competition was held in 1947, but the resulting plans for the city center were not implemented until 1953, when Kassel's famous "street of stairs" was built. See Karin Schrader, Ralf Zumpfe, and Carsten Thiemann, *Architekturführer Kassel* (Kassel: Thiele & Schwarz GmbH,1997).
[117] Simon Louis du Ry built the Fridericianum for the art collections of the Landgrave Friedrich I of Hessen between 1769 and 1776. See Kurt Winkler, "II. documenta '59 – Kunst nach 1945," in Michael Bollé and Eva Züchner, eds., *Stationen der Moderne* (Berlin: Berlinische Gallerie, 1988), 427.
[118] The Fridericianum remains the focus of *documenta*, the most central of all the buildings involved in the exhibition and the point at which most visitors enter the exhibition. The museum tends to feature works by more established artists, as at *documenta 11* in 2002 in which three floors of the open entrance hall were dedicated to the work of Hanne Darboven.
[119] Hans Curjel, "Göppinger Plastics als raumgestaltendes Material in der 'documenta' Kassel 1955," *Heft 1 der Göppinger Galerie*, Frankfurt/M. 1955. Quoted in Kimpel, *Rekonstruktion*, 12.
[120] The ruin stands as a marker of the war, of German defeat, and as such it evokes everything that came before that defeat. At the same time, the ruined Fridericianum could not offer a direct indictment of

neoclassical grandeur of the fragile building contrasted with the interior's innovative modernist display treatments, which utilized industrial materials and experimental design inspired by the Bauhaus.[121]

The thematization of old and new at *documenta* began immediately inside the foyer of the Fridericianum [large, unnumbered central space on the plan, Fig. 1.4], where a large wall was reserved for a montage of photographs of objects from ancient Africa, Latin America, and the Near East [Fig. 1.5]. This visual preface to the exhibition placed the origins of German modern art far in the past and suggested an affinity between modern art and ancient or "primitive" art, reminding the viewer, as one critic wrote, "that all these [archaic] things have left traces in the art of the last fifty years."[122] But no images of modern art were included in the entryway montage, so the comparison was alluded to rather than demonstrated directly. Without engaging in a lengthy discussion through wall texts or formal analysis, the display was not a scholarly comparison but instead suggested a reiteration of the thesis that the modern artists who had borrowed freely from "primitive" art had access to the authenticity and spiritual power of those

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National Socialism. Defeat is not the same as guilt, and there is a blank space left in the process of signification. Similarly, within the exhibition, there was no direct reference to National Socialism. Instead it was left a big blank, a space between a Before and an After.

[121] Ulrike Wollenhaupt-Schmidt (*documenta 1955*, 83) demonstrates the influence of El Lissitzky in the organization of the rooms and in the mounting of paintings. For many reviewers, the overall design of the exhibition was a "masterful example of the most modern of exhibition techniques" and reiterated the return of modernity which the artworks themselves signaled. The use of industrial materials, floating walls, floor-to-ceiling curtains, and indirect lighting were understood as signs of innovation and The design, together with the show's content, created an overall impression of "modernity." See for example Ulrich Seelmann-Eggebrecht, "Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte des Jahrhunderts," *Mannheimer Morgen* 19.7.1955, quoted in Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel, *documenta. Erste internationale Kunstausstellung - eine fotografische Rekonstruktion* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), 26.

[122] Johan Frerking, "Documenta," in *Hannoversche Presse*, 23. July 1955. Quoted in Kimpel and Stengel, *Rekonstruktion*, 14.

artworks.[123] Walter Grasskamp has interpreted the montage of "primitive" art objects as suggesting a continuity of the archaic which refutes the continuity of the classical that had been championed by the National Socialists only a decade before. The entry montage, then, becomes a sort of visual preamble to the historical and contemporary sections of the exhibition proper.[124]

While the entryway's historic montage set a tone of transcultural artistic continuity, the museum's main hallway [between numbers 11 and 12 on the plan, see Fig. 1.4] celebrated the 20th-century artists who represented that continuity within *documenta* with large photographic portraits, arranged on the wall in two four-by-four grids [Figs. 1.6 and 1.7].[125] These portraits exerted a magnetic power over *documenta's* viewers. "It is strangely compelling to observe how spellbound people are by these colossal photographic portraits," wrote one reviewer. "They nearly remain longer here than they do in front of the artworks, unable to tear themselves away from studying these faces."[126] Walter Grasskamp has noted that the majority of the portraits used in this display depict the artists wearing suits, smocks or lab coats, or other professional dress. In this type of dress the artists appear not as the unkempt, unpredictable madmen and radicals the

[123] For a discussion of the influences of "primitive" art on the German Expressionists and the perception of this influence in the contemporary discourse, see Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

[124] Grasskamp further asserts that the lack of wall texts was a missed opportunity on the part of the organizers to recall the political roots of much of the modern art that was displayed at *documenta*, an approach symptomatic of the postwar ambivalence towards the National Socialist period. Grasskamp, "'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* , eds. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 163-191.

[125] The angle and framing of photographs of this wall make it difficult to decipher the identity of all those portrayed, but they include Ernst Barlach, Willi Baumeister, Max Beckmann, Lovis Corinth, Max Ernst, Werner Heldt, Karl Hofer, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, Emil Nolde, the artists of the *Brücke* group, Franz Marc, Oscar Schlemmer, and Kurt Schwitters. Several prominent artists from outside of Germany were also shown, including George Braque, Fernand Léger, Henry Moore, Joan Miro, and Pablo Picasso; see Kimpel and Stengel, *Rekonstruktion*, 16.

[126] Walther Kiaulehn, "documenta. Fünfzig Jahre moderne Kunst im Spiegel der großen Kasseler Ausstellung," in *Münchner Merkur*, 30. June 1955. Quoted in Kimpel and Stengel, *Rekonstruktion*, 20.

National Socialists had described, but as familiar, productive members of the middle class.[127] The reviewer quoted above remarked, "These are primarily elegant, serious…gentlemen who look more like scientists, poets with white coats and slide rules, laboratory workers."[128] It is worth noting, too, that the general consistency among the depictions chosen by Bode and Haftmann for this display characterizes the modern artist as a professional who is reassuringly similar to other artists and to men of other professions.

The portraits of artists located nearest to the main doorway were especially important in the context of an exhibition which proposed a cohesive lineage of German art history. Importantly, the portraits in the most prominent positions were of individuals already deceased: Franz Marc, Max Beckmann, Paul Klee, Willi Baumeister, Oskar Schlemmer. Their images oriented the viewer as she entered the main exhibition space, with Beckmann's and Klee's hung most centrally, just above eye level on the left and right sides of the doorway. For many West German postwar critics and curators, Beckmann and Klee were the acknowledged leaders of modern German art, and together their portraits suggest a stylistic and historical orientation for the rest of the show.[129] The continued importance of the Expressionist movement in the narrative of modern German art is indicated by the photograph of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's 1926 painting of the *Brücke* artists (Otto Mueller, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, and Karl Schmidt-

[127] In Grasskamp's analysis, the choice to use photographs of artists dressed this way, like the lack of labels in the entryway, was evidence of the larger neutralization and homogenization of modernism enacted at *documenta*. Walter Grasskamp, "'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I," 170.
[128] Walther Kiaulehn, "documenta. Fünfzig Jahre moderne Kunst im Spiegel der großen Kasseler Ausstellung," in *Münchner Merkur*, 30. June 1955. Quoted in Kimpel a, *Rekonstruktion*, 20.
[129] Both artists were the subject of numerous publications after the war, and attention to Beckmann increased after his death in 1950 and subsequent retrospective exhibition at the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 1951. After Beckmann's death, Will Grohmann expressed concern that none of the surviving older artists were strong enough to inspire younger artists.

Rottluff), visible below the portrait of Klee in the photographic documentation of the wall [see Fig. 1.7]. But the role of the Expressionists at *documenta* was quite different from their role at the 1951 Künstlerbund show, at which these artist acted as living keys to the intact legacy of German art. At *documenta*, even the surviving Expressionists were relegated to a specific historical moment, their work confined to the past, rather than being integrated in a description of the artistic production of the present.

Grasskamp has noted that although *documenta* can be demonstrated to be a critique of the National Socialist show of *Degenerate Art*, its organizers made no explicit references to the 1937 exhibition. Instead, Bode and Haftmann alluded to the earlier Nazi show through the placement of certain significant works of art at *documenta*. The most striking example is that of Wilhelm Lehmbruck's *Die Knieende* (*Kneeling Woman*) (1911), which was located in the Fridericianum's rotunda [Fig. 1.8], the first large room seen by visitors once they had entered the exhibition space proper [number 9 on the plan; see Fig. 1.4].[130] The piece was flanked by two smaller sculptures by the same artist, and it held the central position in this half-circular staircase leading to the museum's upper floors. *Kneeling Woman* was a well-known work, exhibited in the 1911 Salon d'Automne, as well as at the important Cologne Sonderbund and Berlin Secession exhibitions of 1912, and it was the only German sculpture to be shown at the Armory show in 1913.[131] Grasskamp argues that the placement of Lehmbruck's *Kneeling Woman* served a symbolic function: the same piece had stood in the center of one of main rooms at the *Exhibition of Degenerate Art* in 1937 [Fig. 1.9]. By placing the sculpture in a

[130] The location of the sculpture and the orientation of the room are both corroborated by Carl Georg Heise's review of *documenta*. See Carl Georg Heise, "documenta.1955," in Carl Georg Heise, *Der gegenwärtige Augenblick. Reden und Aufsätze aus 4 Jahrzehnten* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1960), 126.
[131] Dagmar Grimm, "Wilhelm Lehmbruck," in Stephanie Barron et al., *Degenerate Art. The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1991), 290.

privileged location in the Fridericianum's rotunda, *documenta*'s organizers reclaimed its position within the canon of modern art.[132] Lehmbruck's *Sitzender Jüngling* (*Seated Youth*) (1918) [Fig. 1.10] replaced *Kneeling Woman* approximately one month into *Degenerate Art*.[133] At the 1955 *documenta*, this second work of Lehmbruck's stood in the passageway behind the rotunda, within sight of the *Kneeling Woman* [room 9 on the plan; see Fig. 1.4]. The proximity of these two pieces reinforces Grasskamp's argument that Lehmbruck's work was not shown only because of its importance in the early twentieth century but also because of its primary position within the Nazi installation. Together, these two sculptures unmistakably evoked that earlier context.[134]

I also identify a similar dynamic at work in the arrangement of the five paintings by Oscar Schlemmer which were hung prominently on the rotunda's wall [Figs. 1.11 and 1.12]. Just as the cluster of Lehmbruck's sculptures recalled their earlier discrediting by the Nazis, Schlemmer's paintings, hanging in close proximity to the *Kneeling Woman*, referred to the National Socialists' targeting of Schlemmer. In 1930, Nazi officials in the state of Thuringia destroyed the murals Schlemmer had designed for the Weimar Bauhaus, including a major work in the central stairwell of the workshop building. This attack on the Bauhaus was the Nazis' first major act of censorship and took place even before the party's wider national victories in 1933.[135] It became emblematic of the onset of the National Socialist persecution of modern artists. With this history, Schlemmer's

[132] Walter Grasskamp, "'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I," 178.
[133] Barron, *Degenerate Art*, 291.
[134] Ibid., 63 (multi-page fold-out).
[135] See Barron, *Degenerate Art*, 336. Paul Schulze-Naumburg, a prominent Nazi art policymaker, gave the orders to destroy Schlemmer's murals when he became head of Weimar's State School for Architecture, Fine Art, and Handicraft, the successor school housed in the Bauhaus premises, on 1. April, 1930. See Magdalena Droste, *bauhaus* (Köln: Taschen, 2002), 227.

paintings at *documenta* would have provided a powerfully symbolic orientation to the rest of the exhibition, casting it as a conscious reclaiming of modern art.[136]

Joining Lehmbruck's works in the curved chamber behind the staircase [room 10 on the plan; see Fig. 1.4] were paintings by Paul Klee, including *Schwebendes* (*Floating*) (1930) and *Ad Parnassum* (1932) [see Fig. 1.10].[137] In the context of Lehmbruck's sculptures and Schlemmer's paintings, Klee's works reiterate the range of figurative and abstract artistic production of the prewar period. Photographs of this space, taken together with the floor plan, suggest that these works were almost hidden away, tucked behind the stairs in a relatively small space, but even so Klee's works resonated strongly. One critic remarked that they "form[ed] the heart of the exhibition" and "would have made the trip to Kassel worthwhile even on their own."[138] And yet, however powerful they were as evidence of German modernism's former glory or as symbols of restitution, the works in this room served yet another purpose within the exhibition. The organization of these objects signified a transition from the pre- to the post-war era. Situated in the rotunda, they created a link between the past and the present. While they referred to Germany's

[136] I understand this to be both a symbolic and a thematic reference to Schlemmer and stairwells. A number of the artist's paintings dealt with stairs; for example, *Stairs of Women* (1925) and *Bauhaus Staircase* (1932). The placement of Schlemmer's *Fifteen Figure Group* (1920) high on the rotunda wall would have made it difficult to view, but the four other works hanging nearby likely compensated for the lack of visibility with a reiteration of theme and style. In addition, this prominent placement of Schlemmer may have served as a reference to both the artist and to the Bauhaus in general, acting as a lens through which the visitor would recognize certain design elements in the show's installation as employing Bauhaus principles. Thus the design of the exhibition, too, rescues the Bauhaus from the National Socialists. Wollenhaupt-Schmidt (81) has suggested the application of Bauhaus-influenced design principles in Bode's organization of the Large and Small sculpture rooms at *documenta*. She likewise detects the influence of El Lissitzky in the installation of the paintings on the exhibition's upper floor (83). One contemporary reviewer, however, linked *documenta's* design to recent Italian and North American trends in exhibition design. See Hans Curjel, "Die Formung des documenta," *Die Innenarchitektur* 3,10/1956, 628-9, quoted in Kimpel, *Rekonstruktion*, 28.

[137] One view of Lehmbruck's *Kneeling Woman* reveals that at least one of Schlemmer's paintings also hung in this room; see Kimpel and Stengel, *Rekonstruktion*, 25.

[138] K. F. Ertel, "documenta. Panorama der Moderne," in *Kunst und Volk*, June 1955. Quoted in Kimpel and Stengel, *Rekonstruktion*, 42.

historical modern innovators and publicly reversing their vilification by the Nazis, these works also suggested a transcendence of the phases of modernism which they represented, and they set up contemporary painting as *documenta's* real focus.

Climbing the stairs, visitors moved upwards towards the contemporary artworks of the large painting hall, the centerpiece of *documenta*. From the prominent reversal of *Degenerate Art* formulated by Bode and Haftmann in the rotunda, the viewer emerged at the top of the stairway to face the latest in European postwar painting [room 27 on the plan; Fig. 13]. Critics saw the upper floors, and this room in particular, as the culmination of the exhibition.[139] Apart from being the largest, this room was also the most structurally finished of the exhibition spaces, without the provisional design elements, including exposed beams and unfinished floors, that characterized the rest of the rooms in the museum. Its polished appearance emphasized the gallery's importance within the larger exhibition. The long, rectangular space was partitioned by two paintings mounted on smaller, moveable walls at either end: Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror* and Fritz Winter's *Komposition vor Blau und Gelb* (*Composition Before Blue and Yellow*) [Figs. 1.14 and 1.15], which the artist had produced especially for *documenta*. Lining the walls between these two works were recent paintings by West German artists interspersed with works by artists from the rest of western Europe, the majority of which were artists working in Paris.[140] The balance of the space, emphasized by the juxtaposition of Picasso and Winter (the winner of the second prize at the 1951 Künstlerbund show), created the impression that West German artists had not only rejoined the European avant-garde but were

[139] See Kimpel and Stengel, *Reconstruction*, 108.
[140] These included Joan Miró, Georges Rouault, Marie-Helène Vieira da Silva, and Fernand Léger, who died during the exhibition.

already producing work on par with that of other European artists.[141] One reviewer noted "how much art's national distinctions are in the process of disappearing. This art is European, because it is less [nationally] differentiated than any previous art. The determination of the artists in following new paths has resulted in a shift to the super-national, just as it did in the Renaissance."[142] *documenta* was evidence of West Germany's integration with Western Europe, Britain, and the United States.[143]

At *documenta* the radically new quality of the pictures in the Large Painting Hall was further reinforced by a comparison to the other rooms surrounding it. Here the strategy of recuperating early twentieth century art that was employed in the rotunda continued and had the additional effect of defining contemporary West German art. The largest of these rooms and the key to this strategy was a gallery of German Expressionist paintings directly adjacent to the Large Painting Hall [room 21 on the plan; see fig. 1.13)]. Like the work of Lehmbruck, Klee, and Schlemmer, the presence of Expressionism at *documenta* recalled the *Degenerate Art* exhibition of 1937, the last time this art had been exhibited in Germany in any real numbers.[144] The Expressionist gallery included paintings by members of the Brücke group and the Blaue Reiter, such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Otto Müller, and Alexei Jawlensky [Fig. 1.16], as well as artists like Paula Modersohn-Becker who were not associated with either group but were linked

[141] Asmall space devoted to the work of Henri Matisse was located behind Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror*. Sequestered this way, his reduced figurative compositions did not distract from the overall emphasis in the hall on total abstraction.
[142] "documenta," in *Die Weltkunst* 25, 15/1956, 5-6, quoted in Kimpel and Stengel, *Rekonstruktion*, 80.
[143] The U.S. contribution was limited to one work by Alexander Calder.
[144] The 1946 *Algemeine deutsche Kunstausstellung* in Dresden included works by living Expressionist artists, but the show was not historical in focus. Martin Damus lists a number of later exhibitions: *Neue deutsche Kunst* in Konstanz and *Deutsche Kunst der Gegenwart* in Bamberg, both 1946; *Neue deutsche Kunst* in Mainz, 1947. These, like *documenta*, offered a survey of the art that had been criminalized by the Nazis, but they were considerably smaller and not nearly as ambitious as Bode's and Haftmann's later historical-contemporary scheme. See Martin Damus, *Kunst in der BRD 1945-1990* (Reinbek beii Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1995), 35-36.

stylistically to the Expressionist movement. All of these artists had been persecuted by the National Socialists.[145] Although many of the artists featured in the Expressionist room were still living and working in 1955, Bode and Haftmann represented these artists with works dating to the first and second decades of the twentieth century.[146] Works by some of the same artists who had shown with the Künstlerbund four years earlier, including Otto Dix, Erich Heckel, Gabriele Münter, Emil Nolde [Fig. 1.17], Max Pechstein, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, were exhibited here as representative examples of one of the high points of German modernism. At *documenta*, these artists were clearly relegated to the past.

The canonization of the Expressionists and the resulting definition of a classic modern German art was essential to the description of contemporary German art in the Large Painting Hall. The large size and prominent position of the Expressionist gallery are undoubtedly evidence of the importance of that art within the narrative constructed at *documenta*. Far from simply dismissing Expressionism as archaic, the organizers needed to reclaim Expressionism, to emphasize its historical validity, in order to create a legitimizing history for the new art of the Federal Republic. The criticism of the 1951 Künstlerbund show demonstrates that, at the time, Expressionism was still considered "typically German." At *documenta*, the Germanness of Expressionism was a foil to contemporary West German art, which superceded national categories and held its own against French, Italian, and British artwork.

[145] Individual segments of this room were devoted to the pre-war work of Oscar Kokoschka, Max Beckmann, and Marc Chagall.
[146] Of the six artists I mention here, all but Pechstein, who died in 1955, survived into the 1960s and even the 1970s.

In addition, the juxtaposition of figurative and abstract art that characterized the 1951 Künstlerbund exhibition was used by Bode and Haftmann to separate the old from the new in German art. Expressionism and other expressive-figurative art appears obsolete at *documenta*, as the position of Karl Hofer's work in the exhibition illustrates [room 23 on the plan; see Fig. 1.13]. Three paintings by Hofer served as a gateway into the Expressionist gallery, hanging on the wide piers between its doorways: *Wächter im Herbst* (*Watchmen in Autumn*) (1936), *Masken* (*Masks*) (1922), and *Die schwarzen Zimmer* (*The Black Rooms*) (1943) [Fig. 1.18]. Hofer's introspective and often melancholy compositions resonated with the same emotional power of Expressionist work, and their location at *documenta* emphasized these apparent commonalities. *The Black Rooms* [Fig. 1.19], the work illustrated in the exhibition catalog, was repainted by the artist in 1943 after the original of 1923 was destroyed in an air raid. The "black rooms" of the title are not, in fact, black, but are rendered in dark earth tones ranging from a muddy yellow to grey-green. The composition's small space is divided by a door on the left and a doorframe on the right, with windows against the wall opposite the viewer providing a subdued light source. A nude man with a snare drum stands facing the viewer in the center of the work, dark eyes peering out of a reduced, almost schematically rendered face typical of Hofer's later painting. As in most of Hofer's work from the 1930s on, this and the other bodies in the painting have defined contours but lack most anatomical details; facial features, musculature, and bone structure are indicated through only the most necessary lines while the bulk of the body remains flattened. Clothing (in this case, limited to the green smock of the figure leaving the room to the right) is

geometric and appears heavy and stiff. The nudity of the figures, the lack of a coherent action, and the puzzling space in which they all stand suggest no obvious narrative.

In general Hofer's painting is quieter than the bolder Expressionist works that hung around it at *documenta*, for example, Nolde's bright landscapes and Kirchner's lurid images of women. And, although *The Black Rooms* was painted in the 1940s, at *documenta* it was used as a work from the 1920s and hung near works from two to three decades before. In other words, the actual chronology of Hofer's painting—and the fact that he had continued producing work until his death in early 1955—was less important in Bode's and Haftmann's interpretation of the paintings than their representational style was. The curators grouped Hofer's paintings with other figurative pictures. The juxtaposition of the two large rooms on the Fridericianum's second floor, the Expressionist gallery and the large painting hall, implies that these two spaces were conceived by Bode and Haftmann as an opposing pair in which stylistic specifics were less important than was creating a division between old figuration and new abstraction. Hofer's location in the proximity of the Expressionists underscored that division. The juxtaposition was further reinforced in the other end of that same hallway [room 26 on the plan; see Fig. 1.13], which featured works by Wols (Wolfgang Schulze), a German expressive abstract painter who had lived in Paris for twenty years before dying in 1951 [Fig. 1.20]. Wols' work, no doubt, hung near the large painting hall because he had been a forerunner of the *informe* movement in France and had influenced younger painters in both Paris and western Germany.[147] With Hofer on one end and Wols on the other, the

[147] Significantly, the young West German painters who were influenced and inspired by Wols and several of the French artists showcased in the large painting hall were not included in the first *documenta*, in spite of significant regional attention in Düsseldorf and Cologne. See Bernhard Schultz, ed., *Grauzonen/Farbwelten . Kunst und Zeitbilder, 1945-1955* (Berlin: NGBK/Medusa, 1983), 212-213.

organizers created a progression from classic but out-of-date German figurative art to the cutting-edge European abstraction.

CONCLUSIONS

Documenta's scale and scope made it unusual. Although a few smaller shows of international modern art had dotted West German museums and galleries previously, it was the first major postwar exhibition to place German art of the early twentieth century in a continuum with that of the rest of Europe, and the first to make that art available to a wider audience. "Finally we in Germany, too, have experienced an exhibition that is a true accomplishment," raved one critic.[148] Bode and Haftmann designed *documenta* to embody a linear progression from pre- to postwar German art. This linear process required first a reconciliation with Germany's National Socialist past, ostensibly accomplished by privileging of the art once targeted by the Nazis. The second step in this process, then, was to assert West Germany's role as both heir to these past accomplishments, and as full and equal member of the newly regenerated European artworld. Thus *documenta* both salvaged the past and made a definitive pronouncement on the present.

In 1951, the task of the Künstlerbund had been to reveal the continuity of its members and of "progressive" (i.e., modern) German art. The Künstlerbund did so through its criticisms of the West German state as well as at its exhibitions. The group insisted that that cultural continuity with Germany's positive past was fragile and could be preserved only with a vigilant eye toward the reactionary tendencies that continued to resurface in West German cultural politics. In this way, the historical fact of the National

[148] Wilhelm Westecker, quoted in Kimpel, *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, 253.

Socialist period and its repression of modern artists was made a presence in the everyday practice of that artists' organization. Hofer, especially, continually reiterated the dangers of forgetting what Germans had done to German art in the 1930s and '40s. At *documenta*, on the other hand, the 1930s and 1940s no longer played a direct role. Indeed, with all of its overtures to reversing the damage of *Degenerate Art* and other Nazi cultural crimes, *documenta* made no specific mention of those events, or of the art associated with National Socialism, relying instead on the viewer's memory and the artworks' ability to call that memory to mind. Rather than suggesting an unbroken continuity between the modern art of the periods before and after the Nazi era, *documenta* left a gap in the historical narrative, a negative space that was evocative, but still vague. *documenta* emphasized instead the most promising aspect of contemporary West German art, its lack of discernible national character. The 1955 show asserted that West German art was compatible with other European modern art and, by extension, that the Federal Republic was integrated into the cultural community of the democratic West.

Chapter Two: Industry, Art, and History. The Corporate Image at *Art Exhibition Iron and Steel 1952*

> During the years following the collapse, the German iron and steel industry sustained grave wounds. With the art exhibition *Iron and Steel*, [industry] has made a renewed connection to the great traditions of its founders in spite of all these previous difficulties. [The exhibition] will be a sign, even beyond the borders of Germany, that the factories of the German iron and steel industry recognize that man does not live from bread alone.
>
> Kuratorium *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl*[149]

> After two world wars, Mannesmann-Export means more than the sale of industrial products and commodities. [It] is an agile organization working in the service of good will, and the cultivation of friendships from person to person and from nation to nation. Mannesmann is not only the intermediary of economic relations, but also an ambassador from the Rhine and Ruhr for German culture.
>
> Mannesmann-Export GmbH Düsseldorf[150]

In the first decade after the war, the production and interpretation of art in the Federal Republic was more than an aesthetic pursuit. Both the activities of the Deutsche Künstlerbund and the narrative presented by the organizers of *documenta* demonstrate that West Germans used art to define their own history and to establish powerful continuities between the Germany of the 1950s and the Germany that had existed before the advent of National Socialism. The histories evoked by the Künstlerbund and by *documenta's* planners allowed them to negotiate the troublesome Nazi legacy in a way that strengthened their position in the postwar present. Importantly, the role played by

[149] Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl Düsseldorf 1952* (Essen: Girardet, 1952), 18-19.
[150] Mannesmann-Export GmbH Düsseldorf, quoted in Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl*, n.p.

politicians and other public figures in the cases of the Künstlerbund and *documenta* indicates that the use of art as a mediator between past and present was not limited to members of the West German artworld, but was used by those outside of it as well. In this chapter, I extend my investigation of the interpretive function of art into the wider public sphere. My subject here is West German industry, whose utilization of art I consider in the context of the 1952 exhibition *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl 1952* (*Art Exhibition Iron and Steel 1952*, hereafter *Iron and Steel*).[151] The show was organized and funded by a consortium of West German iron and steel producers, whose idea was to "to bring the iron and steel industry into contact with art and artists" and to encourage "a significant representation of its community […]."[152] By providing artists with financial support, the organizers hoped that industry would in turn be rewarded with new images of itself. As I discuss below, *Iron and Steel* was also understood as a continuation of older patterns of industrial patronage in Germany; the show was thus a way for industrialists to reclaim a positive aspect of their own past before the war. *Iron and Steel*, then, offers further evidence of contemporary art's role in the interpretation of the past and the characterization of the present in West Germany, in this case in the interest of reshaping industry's public image.[153]

The ambitious scope of the project and the significant response it received in the press—in East as well as in West Germany—indicate that *Iron and Steel* was an important exhibition in the Federal Republic. But it is the show's situation outside of the context of the artworld, in the service of industry, that makes *Iron and Steel* especially

[151] *Iron and Steel* was open from 30. April to 2. June 1952.
[152] Ibid., 14
[153] As an early postwar example of corporate art sponsorship, it also has implications for our understanding of later patterns of corporate patronage of the visual arts in the Federal Republic.

fascinating. This is true in spite of the fact that the exhibition poses a number of difficulties for the researcher, both in terms of material evidence and in terms of the evaluation of that evidence. One of these difficulties is the uneven quality of the show's historical record. Although most aspects of the exhibition planning are well preserved in the Main State Archive in Düsseldorf, I have been unable to locate basic information about the execution of the show, such as an installation plan or a complete list of prize-winning works. Other complications are caused by the lack of any administrative record for an entire section of the exhibition that was added shortly before the show opened. An analysis of the show is further handicapped by the lack of color reproductions of the works in the exhibition, and by the relative obscurity of the artists who produced them. (This is perhaps typical for an exhibition with such a sweeping scope, and one which placed an emphasis on supporting younger artists who had not yet established careers and thus have left few contemporary traces.)

In the first part of this chapter I present the most complete history of the planning and reception of *Iron and Steel* that is possible given the limitations posed by the archival material. But what quickly became clear in the course of my research is that, while this factual information provides a contemporary context for the show, it is not the best evidence of the dialogue between history, art, and industry that the exhibition engendered. Rather, the show's catalog offers more compelling proof, and it is the catalog that is the focus of the second and more extensive part of my investigation. The catalog is both a document and an extension of the show, and it functions as an instrument of communication in its own right. In the separate sections of the catalog, art historians, the exhibition's jury, and the corporate sponsors act as three collective

authors, each of whom advocates a distinct representation of West German industry. Whatever the catalog's limitations, the tension between these different representations is unmistakable and demands a thorough consideration.[154]

The reception of the show is another important source for my discussion, and it indicates that conservative naturalistic modes of representation dominated one part of the exhibition; these modes are also conspicuous in the sponsors' advertisements in the catalog. By "conservative naturalistic modes," I mean representational styles in which the artist renders the physical properties of the object with a strict adherence to how it appears in the physical world.[155] The conservative naturalistic modes in use at *Iron and Steel* are the same ones promoted by the reactionary voices that the Künstlerbund confronted in the early 1950s, and they resemble the landscapes and factory views produced by German artists under National Socialism. As I have noted in the Introduction, Nazi art is naturalistic in form, and its subject matter is generally sentimental, appealing to the viewer's emotions in order to evoke feelings that would sustain National Socialist ideology. The same is true of *Iron and Steel's* conservative naturalistic modes, but where the emotions addressed by the Nazi artist were fascistic patriotism and racial superiority, in the context of *Iron and Steel* the emotional appeal of such works aimed to inspire loyalty to a corporate identity and longing for an idyllic integration of industry into the West German social and regional landscape.

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[154] For example, 27 juried works out of more than 500 total in the show were reproduced in the catalog with no indication of how they were chosen, whether they were award winners or perhaps favorites of the sponsors. But this missing information does not diminish the importance of the pictures within the catalog; the images in the different sections play off one another as active producers of meaning regardless of the reasons for which they were reproduced.

[155] Later in this chapter, I contrast these conservative naturalistic modes with "expressive figurative modes," which I understand to be essentially representational styles in which the subject matter is freely and expressively interpreted by the artist.

Formally speaking, then, National Socialist art and the industrial art of the 1950s are very close, but the acknowledgement of this stylistic resonance in the reception of *Iron and Steel* is very limited. Where reviewers do mention the presence of conservative naturalistic representation at the exhibition, they do so by couching it in terms of kitsch or the bad taste of industrialists, and often dismiss it as a joke. The assertion of Karl Hofer and the Künstlerbund that the preference for these regressive modes should be taken seriously, that it signaled the return to or preservation of reactionary values, is missing from the reception of *Iron and Steel*. Thus a study of *Iron and Steel* serves a purpose beyond the immediate concerns of the exhibition itself. It highlights the singularity of the Künstlerbund's work in the early 1950s when, apparently, many West German viewers of contemporary art remained stubbornly silent on this other, more conservative continuity.

PART I. *ART EXHIBITION IRON AND STEEL 1952*: CONTEXT, PLANNING, AND REACTION

Context

Iron and Steel was the brainchild of the managers of seven of West German heavy industry's trade associations. The show was held from May to June 1952 in Düsseldorf, the administrative capital of the Federal Republic's industrial corridor and the city in which these associations had their headquarters.[156] The organizers conceived of *Iron and Steel* as a way to encourage a relationship between the contemporary artworld and the world of industry:

> The iron and steel industry seeks to give new life to the connection between men of business and the artistic production of our time, and to thereby continue an old

[156] Ibid., 14. These were die Wirtschaftsvereinigung Eisen- und Stahlindustrie, die Beratungsstelle für Stahlverwendung, der Verein Deutscher Eisenhüttenleute, die Wirtschaftsvereinigung Gießereien, der Deutsche Stahlbau-Verband (DSTV), der Wirtschaftsverband Stahlverformung, and die Wirtschaftsvereinigung Ziehereien und Kaltwalzwerke.

> tradition.…[This industry] seeks to bring material help to the artists' community, and to provide it with new friends, new financial backers, new patrons. Further, it is a particular desire [of Industry] to provide the artists with new possibilities for the expansion of their creative powers and to seek ways in which the value and meaning of industry and business, as well as the value of the people who work in these areas, can become visible in the work of artists of our time.[157]

As this statement makes clear, *Iron and Steel* was both an attempt to reconnect with an "old tradition" of arts patronage and "to seek ways in which the value and meaning of industry…[could] become visible," that is, to actively intervene in the production of public images of industry in the present.

The initiative behind *Iron and Steel* came at a time in which heavy industry's position in postwar Germany was still somewhat tenuous, and the exhibition was part of a larger effort to counteract negative images of industry with more positive ones. A survey of the contemporary situation clarifies why this makeover was necessary. At the end of World War II, the Allies viewed German industrialists with suspicion because of their cooperation with National Socialism and the profits they reaped through that partnership.[158] For their role in the National Socialist state, the management tiers of German corporations were subjected to the same scrutiny as politicians, military personnel, and public servants.[159] But the Allies' immediate postwar concerns with

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[157] Karl Arnold, Minister-president of North Rhine-Westfalia, quoted in Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl Düsseldorf 1952* (Essen: Girardet, 1952), 14.

[158] Under the total mobilization launched by Albert Speer, whom Hitler appointed as Armament Minister in 1942, Germany's industry was streamlined in its production of arms. For industry, this meant a reduction in red tape, and in some cases the financial benefits of slave labor, but a loss of independence as corporations gave up their independence in support of the Nazi state and the war. See Volker Berghahn, *The Americanisation of West German Industry 1945-1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 54.

[159] Jeffrey Herf reports that between 1946 and 1948, a total of 13,180,300 German citizens in the U.S. occupied zone, 669,000 in the French zone, and more than two million in the British zone were made to complete questionnaires about their activities during National Socialism. Of these millions of Germans, less than one percent were considered "guilty of" or "burdened by" Nazism. Herf points out that in spite of what were likely severe shortcomings in the methods of the Allies in terms of finding and punishing those Germans who had played significant roles in Nazi Germany, the process of denazification nonetheless had

German industry were also tied to an older, more symbolic problem. The success of German industry in the second phase of the Industrial Revolution had been a source of pride for the German nation since the late nineteenth century. In the Allied perception, there was a significant danger that a rebuilt German industry might in turn encourage a rebirth of the kind of virulent nationalism that had brought about National Socialism. The solution seemed at first to be a severe limitation, or even a complete liquidation of German industry. But plans to turn Germany into an agrarian state, totally devoid of heavy industry and thus incapable of resuming the production that had helped rearm Germany after World War I, were scrapped early in the Allied negotiations for reconstruction.[160] While the Soviet Union did dismantle and remove a large number of German factories in the eastern zone, and some facilities were also shut down in the western zones, in the end the Allies allowed industrial production to begin again under careful observation.[161]

The restoration of West German factories was not the only part of reconstruction that was quick to proceed. In order to provide the personnel needed to oversee new production and thus invigorate the West German economy, western Allied authorities also hurried through the denazification of German industrialists. Denazification was the

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the effect of crushing the Nazi party and "keeping it and its would-be successors on the margins of German politicis and society after 1945." In the Soviet zone, the numbers were similarly high: by April 1947, Soviet commissions had investigated some 850,000 former Nazi Party members with 65,000 of those were punished in some way. See Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 204.

[160] A proposal by U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau to dismantle industry in the Ruhr region was intended to prevent Germany from redeveloping armament production; this plan was not implemented because the U.S. leadership determined that the capability for industrial production more generally would be a necessary means of financing German reconstruction. Where the Soviet Union sought to prevent the resurgence of fascism by dismantling the factories and thus the capitalist system that had supported Nazism, the western Allies conceived of reconstruction as fostering the *right* kind of capitalism and considered the guilt of the Germans largely on an individual level. See S. Jonathan Wiesen, *West German Industry and the Challenge of the Nazi Past, 1945-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 42-43.

[161] See Volker Berghahn, *The Americanisation of West German Industry*, 75.

process through which an individual was evaluated by Allied investigators for his or her participation in National Socialism and subsequently punished or rehabilitated. In the end, only a few very prominent industrialists were actually jailed for supporting the Nazi government.[162] In the management structure of industry in the Federal Republic, then, there was little significant personnel change from that of the Nazi era.[163] But while this relatively smooth transition allowed industry to be up and running fairly quickly, the widespread continuity of personnel was also a reminder of industry's recent involvement in National Socialism. Thus in the late 1940s and early 1950s, West German industrialists struggled to redefine their profession and their role within postwar society, acknowledging the new political reality of democracy while preserving key aspects of their enterprises' historical identities.[164]

It is within the scope of this larger public redefinition of industry that *Iron and Steel* should be understood. The scale of the 1952 exhibition and the complexity of its organization were unusual for the time, when resources for cultural events were still severely limited in West Germany. But *Iron and Steel* was not entirely unique. It was one of several initiatives begun in the late 1940s and early 1950s which sought to nurture a relationship between various branches of industry and the fine arts.[165] The first and most

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[162] S. Jonathan Wiesen discusses numerous prominent cases of rehabilitated industrialists, including Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach and Friederich Flick (Wiesen, *West German Industry*, 60-65.

[163] Volker Berghahn discusses the closed network of the West German industrialists, a system of "loyalty and solidarity which held the Ruhr managers together. To the outsider they seemed to form an impenetrable phalanx with its own sense of history, values and consciousness of the latent power of the region." Berghahn, *The Americanisation of West German Industry*, 69.

[164] Wiesen has demonstrated that West German industry's work in the cultural sector was also part of an extensive public relations campaign. Wiesen, *West German Industry*, 160-176.

[165] As the model of Menzel's *Iron Rolling Mill* demonstrates, the idea of industry and industrialists sponsoring the arts was not new in 1951. Klaus Tenfelde and others have documented the Krupp family's use of the visual arts and photography to record the concern's history and to act as advertisement. Tilmann Buddensieg, meanwhile, has documented Peter Behrens' role in integrating the visual arts and design into the environs and mission of the AEG corporation in the first decade of the twentieth century. See Klaus Tenfelde, ed., *Bilder von Krupp. Fotografie und Geschichte im Industriezeitalter* (München: C.H. Beck,

enduring of these projects was an initiative of the West German workforce. The *Ruhrfestspiele* (the Ruhr Festival), West Germany's most important theatre festival, grew out of the direct cooperation between actors and miners in western Germany during the winter of 1946/47.[166] In the late 1940s, the (West) German Trade Union Federation (DGB) assumed responsibility for the event, and in 1949 the state of North Rhine-Westphalia began to contribute financially to the program. A competitive visual art exhibition was added in 1951.[167] The Ruhr Festival remains one of Germany's most important annual cultural events and still operates under the auspices of the Trade Unions. Perhaps in the interest of keeping up with organized labor's sponsorship of the *Ruhr Festival*, in the early 1950s the owners of West Germany's industrial corporations began to pursue the support of the arts as well. In 1951, the Federation of German Industry (BDI), made up of the heads of West Germany's most important corporations, formed its own *Kulturkreis* (Cultural Committee), whose goal was to provide financial assistance for the arts. The BDI felt especially compelled by the circumstances of the postwar moment to respond to what it saw as West Germany's cultural impoverishment:

> The catastrophe visited upon Germany has forced our people to expend all its energy eking out a material existence. This reorientation of the will has resulted in

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1994) and Tilmann Buddensieg, *Industriekultur. Peter Behrens and the AEG, 1907-1914* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984).

[166] Members of Hamburg's state theatre traveled to the *Ruhrgebiet* hoping to scavenge the coal they needed to heat their facility. They were aided by miners who "donated" coal in defiance of the terms of Allied occupation, which restricted coal production and distribution. The company staged a guest performance for the miners in the town of Recklinghausen in the summer of 1947, and the Ruhr Festival developed out of this initial event. See Ruhrfestspiele, "Looking back at the initial stages: 'Coal for Art - Art for Coal'," 4. Februar, 2004 <http://www.ruhrfestspiele.de/geschichte.htm#Geschichtee> (26. October 2004).

[167] A local artists' group, *junger westen* (the young west), had been showing together since 1948, and the city of Recklinghausen had sponsored a prize at each of their shows. The group also sponsored an annual prize for young artists beginning in 1948, was the first such prize in the Federal Republic. *Junger westen's* members were natives of the Ruhrgebiet and much of the work they exhibited drew on industrial themes, rendered in abstract styles the painters had absorbed through travel to Paris and exchange with French artists. In 1951, after several years' effort by Thomas Grochowiak, one of the group's founding members, the *junger westen* show was combined with the *Ruhr Festival*. See Doris Schmidt and Franz Joseph van der Grinten, eds., *Thomas Grochowiak: Monographie und Werkübersicht* (Köln: Wienand, 1994).

> an unprecedented impoverishment of [the people's] spiritual life. One of the first endeavors to fall victim to this self-limitation is art. Many believe art to be a pleasant luxury indulged in during prosperous times, one which, in times of distress, must be relinquished in favor of life's necessities. This restriction is misleading. Art does not simply offer humanity hours of blissful repose, it also helps one to attain the clarity of vision and firm ethos which are essential when threatening demands are made on life. The atrophy of art is the atrophy of all of humanity and would adversely effect even life's necessities.[168]

The Cultural Committee sought to combat this "impoverishment of spiritual life" by providing economic aid "beyond all partisan prejudices and narrow-minded one-sidedness, helping every artistic endeavor worthy of support." It offered grants for the preservation of historical buildings, monuments, and artworks, it funded sales exhibitions to give artists the opportunity to sell their work, and it made donations to museums.[169] Additionally, the Cultural Committee funded grants for promising artists, architects, writers, and musicians whom the West German government, overwhelmed by the financial burden of reconstruction, was unable to support.[170]

To some observers, projects like the *Ruhr Festival* and the activities of the Cultural Committee of the BDI were positive signs that West German society had overcome what one writer called "its feudal and patriarchal features" and that it was beginning to develop, "although with considerable resistance—new forms of social

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[168] From the 1952 preamble of the Cultural Committee's constituion. See Bundesverband der deutschen Industrie, e.V, "Satzung des Kulturkreises im Bundesverband der deutschen Industrie, e.V.," n.d., <http://www.kulturkreis.org/kulturkreis_engine.shtml?id=73> (19. November 2004).

[169] Werner Bührer, "Der Kulturkreis im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie und die 'kulturelle Modernisierung' der Bundesrepublik in den 50er Jahren," in Axel Schildt and Arnold Sywottek, eds., *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau: die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1993), 583-596.

[170] One of the Cultural Committee's first projects was an exhibition of works donated by its members to the Kunsthalle in Hamburg. Like the *Ruhr Festival*, the Cultural Committee remains one of Germany's most powerful and active sponsors of the arts. Significantly, in the postwar years the Cultural Committee was acting in part to fill a void left by traditional patrons of the arts, most notably many from Germany's decimated Jewish population. See Walter Grasskamp and Wolfgang Ulrich, eds., *Mäzene, Stifter und Sponsoren. Fünfzig Jahre Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft im BDI. Ein Modell der Kulturförderung* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001).

order," with industry taking the lead.[171] Both the *Ruhrfestspiele* and the *Kulturkreis* were efforts focused on creating a socially responsible, culturally sensitive identity for West German industry. Although it is never stated by the organizations, it seems implicit that they intended these projects to counteract the negative image of German industry which arose with the end of the war and the process of denazification.[172]

Planning

In 1952, the organizers of *Iron and Steel* saw themselves as part of this new brand of arts patronage, and they bore the majority of the administrative and financial burden of the exhibition. The curatorial committee was made up of members of the sponsoring trade associations, representatives from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the city of Düsseldorf, and several personalities from the local art community. This committee underwrote the organizational phase of the show, funded its prizes, and appointed the members of the exhibition's jury.[173] By awarding monetary prizes and providing a venue at which artists could sell their work to corporate patrons and to the public, the organizers hoped to provide much-needed financial support to West Germany's artists, to foster artistic production and, in turn, to help restore German culture.

In its call for submissions, the curatorial committee frames the exhibition in thematic terms and stipulates that each artist submit two works, one of which would address "iron and steel, the iron-producing or iron-processing industry…and the people

[171] Dr. Karl W. Böttcher, "Moderner Mäzen: 'Eisen und Stahl'" in Welt am Sonntag, 15.12.51
[172] This is not my opinion alone; Jonathan Wiesen and Werner Büher both link the *Kulturkresis* to the rehabilitation of West German industry in the postwar era. See Wiesen, *West German Industry and the Challenge of the Nazi Past* and Bührer, "Der Kulturkreis im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie."
[173] The industry groups provided DM 20,000 for organizing the show; North Rhine-Westfalia provided additional funding, and its minister-president Karl Arnold served as the exhibition's symbolic patron. The Business Association of Iron and Steel also donated DM 60,000 for prize money, which included two first prizes of DM 6,000, two second prizes of DM 4,000, and 4 third prizes of DM 3,000 in the category of painting and sculpture.

who work within those industries."[174] This thematic focus was more important to the organizers than any particular formal approach, and in the announcement they explicitly request submissions "from all artistic movements," opening the exhibition to a large number of applicants.[175] The organizers also limit the call for submissions to artists living in North Rhine-Westphalia, presumably in hopes that a local population would be more likely to have an existing connection to the region's industry.[176] But the show was not limited to residents of the state. The committee also invited artists living in West Berlin to contribute, a move that was politically savvy for both ideological and artistic reasons. By privileging Berlin above other states in the Federal Republic, the committee drew Berlin out of its isolation in the east, far from the rest of West Germany, and it tapped into the city's prestigious contemporary art community, which included the Deutsche Künstlerbund.[177]

Finally, in a move that was never made public, the curatorial committee invited select East German artists to submit work. Like the decision to open the exhibition to those living in Berlin, the inclusion of these East Germans reflects the committee's desire

[174] Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl*, 14.
[175] Ibid., 15.
[176] Another important local factor was Düsseldorf's long history as a center of the fine arts and its internationally recognized arts academy. Nearby Essen, with its recently reopened Folkwang museum and school, and various other cities in the area had similarly strong histories of art production and collection. This local heritage provided legitimacy for the exhibition and emphasized the importance of the local art scene, reaffirming industry's commitment to the region.
[177] In spite of its divided status and its location in the heart of the German Democratic Republic, in the early 1950s West Berlin had a very strong contemporary art community. Aside from the Deutsche Künstlerbund, West Berlin was home to a prestigious art academy, at which many prominent artists taught. Inviting West Berlin artists meant both the inclusion of the now-provincial city in the cultural life of the rest of the country, as well as the appropriation of Berlin's prestige by way of its highly-regarded arts community. Among the more prominent members of the Federation of German Artists to exhibit at Iron and Steel were its president Karl Hofer, the Expressionists Otto Dix and Otto Pankok, as well as the abstractionists Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Fritz Winter, and Georg Meistermann. See Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl*, appendix/exhibition guide.

to maintain the wholeness of German culture in spite of the nation's political division.[178] But here the organizers faced an unusual challenge. The committee was aware that in the politically charged context of divided Germany any solicitation from the west, and especially from western corporations, would be met with resistance by the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). To work around this delicate situation, the committee did not advertise the show publicly in the GDR or contact East German artists directly; as one member put it, "in order to spare the artists any difficulties, the invitation must, under no circumstances, appear to have come from [us]."[179] Instead, the committee contacted some eastern artists privately and was contacted independently by others.[180] The organizers also understood that bringing the work of these artists to Düsseldorf would prove complicated, and they devised a system that would ease the process; they proposed creating a collection point in Berlin for East German submissions, to be overseen by the dean of Berlin's Free University, Edwin Redslob, an adjunct member of the committee. In this roundabout way, both East and West German authorities would be circumvented.[181] The invitation to East German artists to participate would appear to have been extended by a highly respected Berlin academic and not from West German

[178] Article 116 of the West German constitution, ratified three years earlier, states that Germans everywhere are citizens of the Federal Republic, regardless of where they currently reside (see Bundesregierung, 15. August, 2002, <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Gesetze/Grundgesetz-,4245/I.-Die-Grundrechte.htm> (27. October 2004). At the time, Germans could still move back and forth across the border, though with increasing difficulty. Artworks passed with much less trouble, especially more transportable works like graphics and watercolors and East and West German artists often exhibited on the "opposite" side of the border. The Deutscher Künstlerbund's second show in Cologne in 1952, for example, included five prominent East German artists, and artists from the GDR frequently showed in the *Große Kunstausstellung* in Munich in the early 1950s. And, as I discuss in Chapter 3, West German participation in the *Third German Art Exhibition* in Dresden in 1953 was crucial to that exhibtion's conception.

[179] Committee member Dr. Busley in *Iron and Steel* curatorial committee meeting, 30.11.51, HstAD NW60-264.

[180] *Iron and Steel* curatorial committee meeting 30.11.51, HstAD NW60-264.

[181] In these deliberations there is also an implication that this arrangement would protect the East German artists from the suspicion of West German officials who sought to prevent "dangerous" art from the East from infiltrating the Federal Republic. See *Iron and Steel* curatorial committee meeting, 30.11.51, HstAD NW60-264.

industrialists, and the works would travel to Düsseldorf as entries from Berlin rather than from the GDR.[182]

With these various conditions regarding who could submit what kind of artwork from where, the curatorial committee imposed some limits on the type of image that would eventually emerge from *Iron and Steel*. But in the end that image was determined by the jury the committee had appointed. In choosing a jury, the committee had to exercise a degree of caution. As my discussion of the Künstlerbund has shown, in the early 1950s the West German artworld was characterized by a tension between supporters of conservative, naturalistic modes of painting and sculpture and those who advocated more expressive and abstract styles. The committee chose not to side with either of these groups, no doubt because any favoritism of one style or another in a major competition like *Iron and Steel* could be interpreted by the public as undermining the free expression afforded the artist and art lover in West Germany's liberal democracy. The critic Will Grohmann makes the necessity of this neutrality explicit in a review of contemporary corporate sponsorship in the visual arts. Grohmann points out that the collections and donations of German benefactors that existed before 1933 had been determined by personal preferences or by a the taste of a donor or collector. He observes that a different tendency governs postwar sponsorship, and he notes that a neutral attitude toward style and a support of all "worthy" artistic production characterize modern patronage. The critic does not elaborate on what "worthy" art might be. Instead he praises those new

[182] Whether or not the committee really capitalized on the symbolic benefit of inviting East German artists is questionable. A glance at the Eisen und Stahl catalog reveals a large number of participants from Berlin, but no indication of whether they were East or West Berliners, although the cover of the catalog, a hand-cast stainless steel plaque imprinted with "Eisen und Stahl," was designed by the East Berlin metalsmith and photographer Fritz Kühn. Otherwise it seems as if the category "GDR" was subsumed under that of "Berlin," given that the two had a similar ideological charge of Germans held hostage by the Soviets.

West German industrial patrons who do not try to determine "worthiness" on their own, who do not collect or donate based on their own preferences, or on some criteria determined by the state—a reference to East German practices—but instead rely on the expert advice of art professionals to make these decisions for them.[183]

Iron and Steel's curatorial committee followed this advice to the letter. The committee assembled a jury made up of artists from stylistically varied backgrounds and specializations, including four painters, three sculptors, and an architect. All but two of the jury members were educators at West German art academies, and nearly all were based in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, which further tied the exhibition to the region.[184] The appointment of an independent jury was crucial to the integrity of the exhibition; it allowed the committee members to remove themselves from the aspect of exhibition planning they knew least about, and left the responsibility of judging the submissions to the professionals, just as Grohmann had recommended.

In spite of the curatorial committee's scrupulousness, Hans Boventor, an advisor to the curatorial committee and the national director of the West German Trade Union of Visual Artists, warned that protests against the jury were likely once its composition was made public. Writing to the curatorial committee's president Carl Hundhausen,

[183] The primary impetus for these remarks was an exhibition of works donated by different industrial patrons to the Kunsthalle in Hamburg. A subtext in Grohmann's argument and that of other sympathetic critics is that this unbiased support would also stand in opposition to the stylistic hegemony that many West Germans perceived to be on the rise in socialist East Germany. It is striking, given the antipathy between the two men, that Grohmann's arguments here are so similar to those made by Karl Hofer at the same time. Hofer insisted unflinchingly that only artists and other knowledgeable professionals should determine what art receives public funding (see Chapter I). Will Grohmann, "Die Industrie als Mäzen. Ausstellung in der Hamburger Kunsthalle." Neue Zeitung Berlin Ausgabe 10.5.51.

[184] The jury members were Max Burchartz, painter [sic; Burchartz is known primarily for his photographs] and graphic designer and teacher at the Folkwang School in Essen, Ludwig Gees, sculptor and teacher at the Cologne Schools of Applied Arts, Erich Heckel, painter, Stephan Hirzel, architect and director of the State Academy of Applied Arts in Kassel, Heinrich Kamps, painter and director of the State Art Academy in Düsseldorf, Gerhard Marcks, sculptor, Hans Mettel, sculptor and director of the *Städelschule* at the State Academy for Visual Arts in Frankfurt, Robert Pudlich, painter, and Edwin Redslob, dean of the Free University. Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Eisen und Stahl*, 15.

commercial director of one of the branches of the Krupp corporation, Boventor states that "In the current climate of German artmaking there are frequent objections from the side of the artists against all types of prize juries."[185] But Boventor also reassures Hundhausen that such protests, should they in fact be voiced, would not prove damaging to the exhibition because the jury was beyond reproach: "[The members]…are able to evaluate all differently fashioned artworks, to distribute awards fairly, without giving preferential treatment to one or the other group, politically speaking."[186] He further emphasizes that the jury was balanced in terms of the styles in which its members work, and that it was tempered by the members' different professional affiliations, which include the visual arts, architecture, and academia.[187] Werner Doede, director of the Düsseldorf museum and Boventor's fellow committee member, shared this confidence in the jury. Writing to Hundhausen, he notes, in particular, that most of the jury members are educators whose professional backgrounds guarantee their ability to make impartial decisions. "[T]he experience inherent in this occupation…results in a reasonable and, more often than not, restrained attitude toward experimentation, toward 'the novel at any cost.'"[188]

The carefully-chosen, independent jury, the strategically inclusive applicant pool, and the thematic call for participation all shaped the character of *Iron and Steel* while the show was still in the planning stages and before any artists had submitted work. But it

[185] Letter Boventor to Hundhausen 13.9.51, HstAD NW60-264.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Letter W. Doede to Hundhausen 14.9.51, HstAD NW60-264. The comment about the "new at any cost" is a reference to the increasing problem (in the eyes of many West German art critics) of copycat artists who appeared to work in a heavily abstracted style simply to take advantage of the growing popularity of those styles. That there was so much communication between members of the committee with regard to the jury's qualifications indicates just how tricky a subject it was. In a review of the show, committee member Werner Doede takes pains to point out the "composition of the jury as well as its indisputable independence." See Werner Doede, "Zur Düsseldorfer Ausstellung 'Eisen und Stahl'," *Kunstchronik* 5/7 (July, 1952): 176-185

was the decisions of the jury that finally determined exactly how *Iron and Steel* would look. Making those decisions, it turned out, was no small task. The call for participation was hugely successful and, as the news magazine *Der Spiegel* reported, the jury spent six days sifting through "4700 submissions [until] all the smokestacks, forging presses, and rolling mills had made them slightly woozy."[189] In the end, the jury chose 540 works, the majority of which had industry as its subject. Together these juried pictures comprised the first representation of West German industry at *Iron and Steel*, though it was quickly followed by another.

Reaction

In spite of the committee's careful preparation, the success of *Iron and Steel* was cast into doubt when, after the jurying, the jury's choices met with resistance from various members of the public. I have noted that Boventor and Doede linked the jury's objectivity, in part, to its member's diverse stylistic affiliations; in reality, however, the majority of artists who served on it worked in expressive figurative styles characterized by the artist's free interpretation of the subject matter and an expressive use of elements like brushwork and line.[190] Neither artists interested in the more radical mode of total abstraction nor those who worked in a more conservative naturalistic style were represented on the jury. Once the call for entries was publicized, artists who worked in these two broadly-defined styles complained that they would be at a disadvantage in the

[189] "Ein roter Klecks." Der Spiegel, 7.5.52: 32.
[190] Boventor wrote that "Erich Heckel and Robert Pudlich represent the figurative (*gegenstandsgebunden*, "bound to the object") tendency. Professor Burchartz, Professor Gies, and Professor Kamps represent the modern tendency, from Expressionism to abstract painting. Strictly speaking, then, this prize committee includes every mode of painting." But of Burchartz, Gies, and Kamps, only Burchartz, a photographer and graphic designer who trained at the Bauhaus, worked in an abstract mode. The geometric abstraction Burchartz practiced in the late 1940s and early 1950s had little in common with the expressive abstraction that was gaining popularity in West Germany. Letter W. Doede to Hundhausen 14.9.51, HstAD NW60-264.

jurying process. In a letter to committee chair Hundhausen, the president of North Rhine-Westphalia's local branch of the Trade Union of Visual Artists reports that "highly respected [naturalism-oriented] artists have expressed…their unwillingness to submit to such a one-sided [abstraction-oriented] jury." He also registers his concern for the stylistically conservative artists who accused the jury of being "too modernistic and hav[ing] far too little sense of tradition," which they felt would predispose the jury to reach "judgments which will insufficiently consider the older style."[191] The complaints of conservative representational artists were matched by similar concerns voiced by artists from the Düsseldorf area whose work was radically abstract. Like their stylistically conservative colleagues, these artists felt threatened because "the choice of jury members didn't take into account the most contemporary developments of [their] art."[192] These protests came even before the exhibition was mounted. Conservative voices became louder once the show opened and the jury had awarded several of the higher-level prizes to abstract works. It is at this point that the conservative artists were joined in their protest by prominent executives from the sponsoring corporations, including some members of the organizing committee. In *Der Spiegel's* coverage of the exhibition, one committee member is quoted as saying that both the juried works at *Iron and Steel* and the artists who had produced them were simply "too removed from reality."[193] In the same article, the head of public relations for the Business Association of Iron and Steel Manufacturers, the umbrella group funding the exhibition, dismisses the works chosen by

[191]This demonstrates the slippery contemporary use of certain terms and the connotative meanings attached to each mode of painting: abstraction is "modern" and naturalistic art is "traditional." Letter Busley to Hundhausen, 12.9.51, HstAD NW60-264.
[192] Ibid. North Rhine-Westfalia's Ministry of Culture, which was helping to coordinate the exhibition, received the complaints and passed them on to Hundhausen. This and the letters from Boventor and Boede are all dated between the 12th and the 14th of September, suggesting that they were responses to an explicit request from Hundhausen for letters of support in the face of public criticism.
[193] "Ein roter Klecks," 32.

the jury as so radically abstract that the show's intended audience, the employees of industry, could not relate to them. He uses terms which recall both the rhetoric of National Socialism and more contemporary assertions by East German ideologues, complaining that "Our workers are sensitive to nature, they can't comprehend anything like this."[194]

When one takes into account the existing record of the juried work, including the critical reception and the press coverage, the widespread dissatisfaction caused by the jury's decisions is puzzling. Reviewers of the show note that, although the jury honored abstract works, examples of total abstraction were a small percentage of the exhibited paintings and sculptures.[195] If the artworks reproduced in the catalog are in fact representative of the rest of the show, the jury primarily chose expressive figurative works in which the subject matter is stylized, but still recognizable, as is the case with one of the first-prize paintings, Helmut J. Bischoff's *Lokomotive* (Locomotive) [Fig. 2.1].[196] This work, like the rest of the juried paintings illustrated in the catalog, is reproduced in black and white, so I am unable to evaluate the artist's use of color. But a consideration of line and scale in *Lokomotive* reveals that it is, in fact, not far removed from "nature" at all. In Bischoff's picture, the locomotive nearly fills the picture plane. A sliver of track is visible below the engine, and a number of horizontal lines with wavering contours tracing the space above the engine indicate the criss-crossing of telegraph cables. Otherwise the entire space of the picture is occupied by the engine, to the extent

[194] Ibid., 32-33.
[195] Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen's comment on the prevalence of abstraction was, "it is 'there,' and its presence here, as a guest of industry, can be overlooked by absolutely no one!" The very fact that any works of total abstraction were included was in itself a surprise to him and, he states, indicative of the good will of both jury and sponsors. See Albert Schulze Vellinghausen, "Kunst und Eisen," *Der Monat*, August 1952, 434.
[196] The jury awarded both first prizes to paintings, Bischoff's *Lokomotive* and a work by Alfred Haller called *Werklandschaft* ([Indutrial] Plant Landscape). "Ein roter Klecks," 32.

that spatial recession is limited; in this closely focused composition, the details of the locomotive appear severely flattened. Bischoff further reduces the surface of the engine to a series of lines of varying thickness and contrasting angles. But his representations of a few key elements of the locomotive allow the subject to be recognizable: the chimney and dome on the top of the engine, the rods which drive the engine's wheels, and the "cowcatcher," which hides the non-driven wheels at the front of the engine.[197]

A few prize-winning works at *Iron and Steel* were more radically abstract than *Lokomotive*. For example, the jury awarded the painter Fritz Winter one of two second-place prizes. Although there is no record of which of the two works that Winter submitted actually won (and neither is reproduced in the catalog), it seems safe to assume that, like Winter's entire mature body of work, it was a completely abstract composition. His *Before the Embers* of 1951, which was shown at the first exhibition of the Künstlerbund, provides an examples of Winter's work from this time [see Chapter I, Fig. 1.2].[198] A younger West German abstract painter, Hubert Berke, won one of the third prizes for a non-representational painting, rather than "for his 'direct' work from inside the steel mill."[199] No doubt it was artworks like these two prize-winning, totally abstract paintings

[197] Bischoff seems to derive his abstraction from the futurist use of repeat lines to connote movement. Representation of the industrial or technological subject like the above example has precedents in the modern art of the early twentieth century, which was profoundly shaped by artists' interpretations of the machine and the consequences of industrialization. Futurism, English Vorticism, and Russian Cubo-Futurism drew inspiration from mechanized motion and speed; the Bauhaus and the Constructivists investigated the aesthetics of standardized production; the machine was the center of the Dadaists' critique of modern life. See for example Gunter Berghaus, *International Futurism in Arts and Literature* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000); Magdalene Droste, *Bauhaus 1919-1933* (Koln: B. Taschen, 1990); Matthew Gale, *Dada & Surrealism* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997); Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometries in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); George Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution* (New York : G. Braziller, 1995).
[198] See Gabriele Lohberg, *Fritz Winter. Leben und Werk. Mit Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und einem Anhang der sonstigen Techniken* (München: Bruckmann, 1986), and Wend Fischer, "Jenseits von Panik und Sentiment. Zur 'Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl' in Düsseldorf." *Die Neue Zeitung*, Berlin Ausgabe 8. May 1952, 7.
[199] See Vellinghausen, "Kunst und Eisen," 435.

that irritated the conservative representational artists and *Iron and Steel's* industrial patrons.[200]

Regardless of the extent to which the juried works were in fact abstracted, the disappointment of the committee members and sponsors had a profound effect on the final form of *Iron and Steel*. The curatorial committee responded to the barrage of criticism from the sponsoring corporations (and from some of its own members) by agreeing to allow a reconsideration of the works that had been rejected by the jury.[201] A second committee, comprised solely of members of the Business Association and acting without any assistance from art professionals, chose approximately one thousand eliminated works to be shown in a "sales exhibition" installed in a hurriedly-renovated machinery hall adjacent to the converted factory building that housed the original exhibition.[202] A brief summary of the events leading up to this sudden change of plans is printed in the catalog, along with the Business Association's assertion that an expansion of the exhibition was necessary because "the intention of the art competition was that our factories become better acquainted with the artists, to the broadest extent possible." What is implied here is that the jury's dismissal of the more conservative, naturalistic works harmed the audience—industry's labor force—by denying it exposure to the full range of contemporary artistic production in Germany. The summary further reports the objections of the artists' union and the city of Düsseldorf's urgent request that the eliminated works be reconsidered for the good of the artists, "since this was intended from its inception to

[200] For the artists who protested the outcome of the show, the issue seems to have been less the proximity of the abstract works to "nature," and more a matter of protecting their livelihoods within the changing stylistic climate of the West German artworld that I have described in Chapter I.
[201] "Ein roter Klecks," 33.
[202] Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Eisen und Stahl*, 88.

be an exhibition focused on the sale of works."[203] This short statement in the catalog interprets the changes made to the exhibition as beneficial to both West Germany's workers, who would be exposed to the largest possible variety of art, and the country's artists, who would have more opportunities to sell their works.[204] Interestingly, the authors do not address the extent to which this arrangement, essentially an intervention in the public representation of their enterprises, also benefited the sponsoring corporations.

It is impossible to reconstruct the sales exhibition because no record was kept of the works it contained or of how it was installed. But reviews of *Iron and Steel* do provide some insight into the general characteristics shared by the works which the sponsors chose. In an long review of the show, the critic Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen notes that most were "poor, dabbed-on, photographically exact copies of nature" in which the industrial subject appears either heroic or romanticized. Vellinghausen speculates that the organizers had chosen to override the jury in order to flatter "a segment of their own workforce, from the factory director to the patent inspector, whose delight in heroic factory views with towering smokestacks needed to be indulged."[205] According to *Der Spiegel*, even Carl Hundhausen, the committee chair, revealed this worrisome predisposition when he purchased a painting, *Schicht im Kohlenpott* (*Shift in the Coal Pot*), from the sales exhibition rather than the from among the juried works. In the sardonic words of one reviewer, this was a picture which "relinquishe[d] any artistic

[203] Ibid., 14.
[204] According to this argument, such a radical modification protected the country's artists by providing an expanded opportunity for those artists to sell their work. The catalog does not comment on the committee's negation of the original authority of the jury, but it does mention the jury's refusal to participate.
[205] Vellinghausen, "Kunst und Eisen," 434.

interpretation in favor of a naïve-realistic depiction..."[206] Another critic remarks that, overall, the sales exhibition was "a true chamber of horrors of kitsch…."[207]

But the sales exhibition was not only a source of amusement. For Vellinghausen at least, it also revealed a disturbing continuity between the industrial culture of the 1930s and 1940s and that of the postwar period. Vellinghausen remarks on two portraits of a CEO, still fresh in his mind from war-era newsreels in which the same businessman "'greeted' the Führer with an outstretched arm" upon the latter's arrival at his country estate.[208] He notes that not only the personalities but also the aesthetics of the sales exhibition had been around for years, and while he does not go so far as to point out similarities between the corporate art at *Iron and Steel* and that promoted by the National Socialists, the implication is unmistakable. Vellinghausen hints at an enduring corporate aesthetic of "specialized paintings of industry and smoke, intended for internal use in administration buildings and conference rooms with oak tables."[209] Another reviewer recognizes the same tendency and draws a connection between the works in the sales exhibition and those reproduced in the advertisements in *Iron and Steel's* catalog. The danger, this critic writes, is that this specialized aesthetic of the industrialists will persist, that the sales exhibition will "encourage too many patrons to make their purchases there [rather than at the juried exhibition], as a number of the advertisements in the catalog leads us to fear."[210] These last comments indicate that the images used in the corporations' advertisements are the best possible indication of works of art that were

[206] "Ein roter Klecks" *Der Spiegel*, 32-33.
[207] Wend Fischer, "Jenseits von Panik und Sentiment. Zur 'Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl' in Düsseldorf." *Die Neue Zeitung*, Berlin Ausgabe 8. May 1952, 7.
[208] Vellinghausen, "Kunst und Eisen," 433.
[209] Ibid., 431.
[210] Heinz Held, "Kunstausstellung 'Eisen und Stahl'," in *Das Kunstwerk* no. 1, 1952: 60.

included in the sales exhibition. By extension, then, it is in the catalog that we can find the image of industry preferred by *Iron and Steel's* sponsors.

PART II. IRON AND STEEL'S CATALOG: CONFLICTING IMAGES OF INDUSTRY

Although it is unlikely that its authors intended it to function in this way, *Iron and Steel's* catalog is a record of the conflicting preferences of the jury and the sponsors that arose during the planning and hanging of the exhibition. This becomes evident in the three sections which make up the catalog. The first section is historical, a collection of essays chronicling earlier corporate patronage and providing examples of older depictions of industry in art. The second section is a sampling of works from the juried exhibition in 27 black and white reproductions, and the third and by far largest section of the catalog is made up of advertisements for the member corporations of the Business Association of Iron and Steel Manufacturers. In these three sections, historians, the jury, and the sponsors function as three different "authors" who each present a distinct image of industry.

One purpose of the historical essays in the first section of the catalog is to emphasize German industry's long history of supporting visual art and artists, and to assert *Iron and Steel* as a demonstration of the sponsors' ongoing commitment to that legacy. Describing the goal of the exhibition, president of the Business Association of Iron and Steel Manufacturers Wilhelm Salewski writes that its primary interest is "to encourage the industrialists, in spite of their diminished fortunes, to accept the obligations handed down to them by the great donors, their role models."[211] This mention of the

[211] Wilhelm Salewski, "Eisenindustrielle als Förderer der Kunst." In Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl Düsseldorf 1952* (Essen: Girardet, 1952), 26.

"diminished fortunes" of the industrialists is the closest reference Salewski makes to the problematic aspects of industry's past, such as its support of the Nazi regime, production of armaments, or the penalties demanded of industry by the Allies at war's end. Salewski and the other authors of the historical section avoid these awkward themes and instead assert the positive accomplishments of German industry as a legacy to be emulated in the postwar era. One author presents the Krupp family's support of numerous monumental art projects as a model for current corporate largess, while another uses the friendship of August Thyssen—one of Germany's first major industrialists—and Auguste Rodin at the turn of the century to illustrate the importance of close relations between manufactures of industrial materials and artists, the producers of culture.[212]

The other objective addressed in this first section is a historical survey of earlier treatments of industrial production in the visual arts and art-historical investigations of iron as a medium (for example, "The Oven at the Cathedral at Fritzlar and Artistic Cast Iron in Ancient and Modern Times"). The historical section also includes an abbreviated history of the *Industriebild*, or industry picture, in three parts, each of which is illustrated with a small black and white reproduction and a full-page, full-color detail: an anonymous Netherlandish painting of a mine and a foundry from around 1550 [Fig. 2.2], Cornelis Schut's *The Forge of Vulcan* (between 1597-1655) [Fig. 2.3], and Carl Schütz's 1835 *Rolling Mill in Lendersdorf* [Fig. 2.4].[213] Although the color reproductions cause these three paintings to stand out, the real cornerstone of the historical portion of the catalog is Adolph von Menzel's monumental painting *Eisenwalzwerk* (*Iron Rolling Mill*)

[212] Salewski, "Eisenindustrielle als Förderer der Kunst," 29-30.
[213] Schütz's painting was included in the 2001 exhibition *Die Zweite Schöpfung*, where it was dated to 1838. See *Die Zweite Schöpfung. Bilder der industriellen Welt vom 18. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2002).

[Fig. 2.5].[214] The 1875 painting is treated in an extensive analysis by the art historian Paul Ortwin Rave, and is illustrated by a full-page black and white reproduction and a single image of a preparatory sketch.

Menzel's *Iron Rolling Mill* emerges as the most significant of the catalog's historical industry pictures in part because it is discussed not just by Rave but by several other authors, as well. Discussing the painting in his essay, "Iron Industrialists as Sponsors of the Arts," Wilhelm Salewski writes that Menzel's painting was the "first, pioneering picture of industry in the modern era." Salewski and other catalog authors use *Iron Rolling Mill* to frame their discussion of the entire exhibition, and they view the painting as an emblem of their larger project, the merging of the interests of industry and the visual arts. Menzel's work was an ideal model for this, not least because it had been recognized by German art historians and critics since its completion in the late nineteenth century as one of the great works of German art and one of the artist's most significant Prussian history paintings.[215] The subject of the work is Prussia's largest state-owned iron mill, the Königshütte, which was located in the province of Silesia in what is now

[214] Werner Hofmann notes that Menzel's painting was given the subtitle "Modern Cyclops" by Max Jordan, the director of the Berlin National Gallery, who linked modern industry to the Cyclops who assisted Hephaestus. See Werner Hofmann, "Menzel's Universality," in Claude Keisch and Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher, eds., *Adolf Menzel 1815-1905. Between Romanticism and Impressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 98). Perhaps coincidentally, the pose of the central group echoes the typical Hellenistic depiction of Odysseus and his companions blinding Polyphemus, in which Polyphemus reclines, drunk, while several of Odysseus' party charge at him with a red-hot lance. Here, the shaft of the casting truck takes place of the lance and the press stands in for Polyphemus. This reading would suggest that, just as Odysseus and his companions have to trick the Cyclops in order to escape him, the modern worker has to outwit the machine in order to master industrial production.

[215] Almost immediately after it was completed, *Iron Rolling Mill* became an anchor of the collection of the National Gallery in Berlin. See Sabine Beneke, "Das Reich der Kraft. Auf den Spuren Adolph Menzels," in Sabine Beneke and Hans Ottomeyer, *Die Zweite Schöpfung*, 216. Menzel finished *Iron Rolling Mill* late in his career, when he was already famous for his illustrations of the conquests of Frederick the Great and his depictions of William I's court. It was purchased by the banker Adolph von Liebermann, the artist's uncle, shortly after it was painted in 1875. In 1876, Max Jordan convinced the National Gallery to buy the painting, by pitching the work as a history painting in the vein of Menzel's other Prussia-themed works. Interestingly, Jordan called it a work which "refrains from intent" (i.e., had no political motivation). See Marie Claude Keisch and Marie Ursula Riemann-Reyher, eds., *Adolf Menzel 1815-1905. Between Romanticism and Impressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 379.

Poland.[216] In *Iron Rolling Mill* Menzel presents the vast interior of the Königshütte and the diverse aspects of iron production and processing which take place inside it on a massive scale (the painting measures approximately five feet by eight feet, or 158 by 254 centimeters).

The artist's interpretation of the operation of the foundry balances an investigation of mechanical and human force; he represents manufacturing in such a way that the worker is neither diminished by the presence of the machine, nor overtly celebrated as its master. The artist composed the immense and extremely detailed painting with the help of hundreds of preparatory sketches made at the Königshütte and at other industrial locations in greater Berlin, a method of direct observation which allowed Menzel to produce a very visceral record of the grueling work done inside the mill from an apparently embedded viewpoint.[217] The main focal point of the painting is shared by worker and machine. A group of five workers and the laminating cylinder into which they feed a cast iron ingot are placed at the center of the composition. One of the workers is depicted standing with his back to the viewer, his body bent in a sharp curve to the left,

[216] The location of Menzel's original subject, the Königshütte, probably added additional symbolic weight to West German interpretations of *Iron Rolling Mill* in the postwar period. Silesia had been "lost" to Poland after the Second World War; as the Red Army advanced, Germans living in the region gave up their homes and possessions and fled westward. After the war, Silesia became the focus of many West Germans' nostalgic desire for *Heimat*, that is, a German homeland, and was invoked by exiles and other West Germans as evidence of German victimhood and Soviet aggression. Heide Fehrenbach's discussion of the West German *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s is an excellent explanation of how the yearning for a lost homeland shaped postwar identity in the west. Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[217] Both the work's size and its composition draw the viewer in to this action. Slightly right of center in the foreground, iron bars hang from the ceiling and collapse the foreground into the middle distance. Similarly, an arrangement of tools much like a small still life in the center foreground of the picture draws attention to a specific point midway between the viewer and the central figures. A brush handle points towards the picture plane, a gesture which leads out of the picture and implies the brush was recently set down by someone standing in the viewer's space. Michael Fried understands this process of drawing in the viewer to be an aspect of "embodiment," the extension of the painter's body into the picture. For Fried, Menzel's realism, like that of Eakins and Courbet, was intrinsically tied to the fact that "all three were intensely bodily painters." See Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 137.

his torso twisting forward and to the right. Another worker depicted standing directly across from him mirrors this position, swaying slightly to his left, his right arm slung over his head. Together the two figures provide a front and back view of single, contorted stance which suggests the physical intensity of the job, a theme which the artist repeats throughout the painting. The result is a picture which describes the cooperation of humans and machines, without neglecting the human exertion required by the industrial production of the time in which it was made.

Menzel's *Iron Rolling Mill* was of interest to the catalog's authors not just because of its treatment of industry as a subject, but also because the artist painted it at the request of a Prussian industrialist in what some of the catalog's authors treat as an early example of corporate sponsorship.[218] Thus by any account, *Iron Rolling Mill* would have been a powerful addition to *Iron and Steel*. But the painting was present at the 1952 exhibition only in the form of the small, black and white reproduction in the catalog. Salewski addresses this notable absence. As part of reparations in 1945, the Soviets had removed numerous paintings, including the *Iron Rolling Mill*, from the Berlin National Gallery, and had provided no indication of where it would be held, or for how long.[219] Salewski writes that the work was safe in an "honored place in the National Gallery until—at the end of the war—it was abducted and held at an unknown location [in the east]."[220] His use of the term "abducted" reveals that he considers the painting a cultural

[218] See Keisch and Riemann-Reyher, eds., *Adolf Menzel 1815-1905.*
[219] The entry for the *Iron Rolling Mill* in the catalog of the Nationalgalerie dates the first (postwar) East German mention of the painting to 1959, indicating that it had been "rehabilitated," reconsidered by East German cultural politicians and deemed appropriate for the collection, regaining its prominent status at the National Gallery (East). See Jörg Makarinus, Manfred Tschirner, Friedegund Weidemann, *Die Gemälde der Nationalgalerie* (CD Rom) (Bonn: Verlag Bild-Kunst, 1996).
[220] Wilhelm Salewski "Eisenindustrielle als Förderer der Kunst," 25. Salewski also describes how Menzel, on the invitation of the president of the iron and steel industry consortium of his day, spent time in a mill in

hostage of the Soviets; and yet, somewhat paradoxically, this loss or lack seems to have increased the symbolic value of the painting in the context of *Iron and Steel*. In the catalog it signifies the persistence of a German artistic tradition in the face of Soviet influence in the GDR.

As the former director of the National Gallery where *Iron Rolling Mill* had hung, Rave was uniquely qualified to discuss the painting, and he too addresses its political potential, though in a more elliptical fashion than Salewski does.[221] Rave begins with a formal description. He refers to the painting as a "museum picture, equal to a monument" and notes that its monumental size allows the artist to explore in great depth the details of the scene.[222] The author asserts that this detail is not just about technical accuracy, but rather establishes the artist's humanist interests: Menzel's painstakingly recorded details are not the focus of the painting in their own right, he argues, but are a backdrop against which real human drama emerges from complex interactions between man and machine. Because Menzel made far more sketches of workers than he did of equipment, Rave claims that the artist was not interested in providing and educational example or "directions for the technician."[223] He praises the artist for faithfully depicting the structure and apparatus involved in the steel-making process without losing the humanity

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Upper Silesia to study his industrial subject. With this brief anecdote, Salewski suggests the cooperation between artist and industrialists which the organizers hoped would develop out of Iron and Steel.

[221] Rave, a prominent art and architectural historian, was provisional director of the National Gallery in Berlin from 1937 to 1945, and director until 1950. As a curator in the early 1930s, Rave was forced to accompany the president of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts Adolf Ziegler and other Nazi art functionaries through various German museums while those officials determined which works would be removed. Rave's Art in the Third Reich (1949) was the first account of the Nazi "cleansing" of modern art, in which he reported on those visits and provided a detailed record of modern works lost. In his role as director at the National Gallery he would have been intimately familiar with the Iron Rolling Mill. See Stephanie Barron et al., *Degenerate Art. The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1991), 87, 403.

[222] Paul Ortwin Rave, "Menzel's Eisenwalzwerk," in Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Eisen und Stahl Düsseldorf 1952* (Essen: Girardet, 1952), 71.

[223] Ibid., 68.

of his real subjects, the workers, to the overwhelming bulk of the machines. But Rave is careful not to take this interpretation too far. With *Iron Rolling Mill* in Soviet hands, he seems pressed to rescue it from an reading that privileges the struggle of the worker.[224] He cautiously situates the picture in the *Gründerzeit*, the period of rapid economic expansion that immediately followed the unification of the German states in 1871, when the growth of industry resulted in a parallel growth of the workers' movement. As he relates the expansion of the various political parties organizing on behalf of workers, Rave asserts that Menzel was the sole artist to recognize the importance of this great societal shift, which he then commemorated in *Iron Rolling Mill*, a painted "meditation on the Prussian state."[225] Rave considers the painting to be a monument to the German worker, but one with a very limited scope. Although it acknowledges the worker's struggles, the author claims, the painting emphasizes a worker's pride in what he does rather than his role in the social movements of the late nineteenth century. By emphasizing Menzels' focus on the individual efforts of the worker rather than on his interest in the nascent labor movement, Rave tries to keep *Iron Rolling Mill* free of overt political associations.[226]

The politically neutral nature of *Iron Rolling Mill* is also emphasized by Theodor Heuss, president of the Federal Republic, in the somewhat terse reading of the painting he works into his introduction to the catalog. Heuss calls Menzel's visit to the mill "accidental," downplaying the artist's interest in the worker as a subject, and argues that

[224] As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, from the late 1940s East German artists were encouraged, at times forced, by the Communist Party to produce thematic works of art which highlighted the enlighted status of the German worker.
[225] Rave, 72.
[226] Recently, Marie Riemann-Reyher has suggested that Menzel was at least concerned, if not directly involved, with the labor movement. See Keisch and Riemann-Reyher, eds., *Adolf Menzel 1815-1905*, 384.

Menzel's choice to paint the mill was "in no way a programmatic position." Rather, Heuss claims, the artist had been moved by the noisy activity and the unusual plays of light within the mill. Heuss also insists that the painting, characterized by "a peculiar precision of drawing and painterly *valeur*," was "an astounding case but not a revolutionary advancement."[227] Instead, the author positions Menzel among his contemporaries, like Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier and the painter Friedrich Keller in Stuttgart; Heuss sees Menzel as one of a few pioneers to approach the industrial subject, but also as part of a larger contemporary European tendency. Heuss' essay thus prevents either a nationalistic reading of Menzel's work as overtly German, or an interpretation of the artist as a proponent of the labor movement.[228] By stating that the work was neither programmatic nor revolutionary—whether in style or in subject—Heuss preemptively stakes out a conservative, or at least apolitical, understanding of the painting.[229]

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[227] Theodor Heuss, "Zum Geleit," in Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Eisen und Stahl Düsseldorf 1952* (Essen: Girardet, 1952), 6.

[228] The latter was an especially important distinction in 1952, as Soviet and East German cultural politicians had recently incorporated Menzel into their list of models for East German artists specifically because of his apparent interest in the theme of the German worker. The reality was that the painting was invisible for nearly a decade, which suggests that East German critics considered the painting to be more about heroicizing capitalism than about the labor movement. I discuss East German historical models in Chapter Three. See N. Orlow, "Wege und Irrwege der modernen Kunst," in *Tägliche Rundschau* 20 and 21. January 1951; in June of 1952, the East German Artists' Conference passed a resolution which names Menzel as a model. "Manifest an die deutsche Künstlerschaft," II. Kongreß der deutschen Bildenden Künstler vom 7. bis 9. Juni 1952, Reprinted in Elimar Schubbe, ed., *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED Vol. 1: 1949-1970* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 200.

[229] This wrangling with the history of organized labor may have been necessary for the Federal President because around the time of *Iron and Steel* organized labor in the Federal Republic was suspected by West German corporations and some politicians of spreading Communism and of cooperating with the GDR. I discuss this at some length in Chapter Three, but it is worth noting here that, given the concurrent interest in East Germany in involving artists with production "in the factories" and in bringing art to the workers on the job, *Iron and Steels* organizers' attempts to distance Menzel from the labor movement are not surprising. *Iron and Steel* as a project was oddly positioned because it had this very same stated goal (in the words of a reviewer, to "bridge the gap between the worker, the daily life of heavy industry along the Rhine and Ruhr, and the art that is scarcely concerned with this life" (Gerhard Schön, "Der Arbeiter ist im Bild," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 6.5.51). On West German corporations and Communist-led strikes, see Gerald

The representation of industry related by the historical section of the catalog, then, is heavily determined by Menzel's *Iron Rolling Mill* and its interpretation by Salewski, Rave, and Heuss. Taken together, these interpretations evoke an industry picture that reflects the humanity of the worker and is informed by his struggles, even as it shows the artist's consciousness of the historic reality of the industrial age in Europe. This image strikes a balance between worker and machine, between objective fact and expressive drama.

The Juried Works

The second section of the catalog, a selection of reproductions of artworks from *Iron and Steel's* juried exhibition, presents an image of industry that has very little to do with the historical models presented by the authors of the previous section. This break is underscored by the contrast between the three full-color reproductions of earlier industry pictures from previous centuries that directly precedes the black and white reproductions of the juried works. And although views of factory interiors, the subject of *Iron Rolling Mill*, predominate among the juried works, the artists take a very different approach to the subject than Menzel did in his painting nearly a century before. Rather than serving as the dynamic focus of the composition as they do in *Iron Rolling Mill*, human figures generally play an understated role in the juried paintings. Images of workers are integrated into the compositions so that they are either absorbed into the background, seem to be inextricably joined to a machine, or are so miniscule that they have almost no compositional purpose other than to provide a sense of scale.

Sommer, "Streik im Hamburger Hafen. Arbeiterprotest, Gewerkschaften und KPD," in *Ergebnisse* 13 (April 1981).

In Heinz Luckenbach's watercolor *Knüppelstraße* (Billet Line) [Fig. 2.6], for example, a worker is depicted using a metal rod to pry at an iron bar as it is extruded from a press. Although the work is reproduced in black and white, the bleeding of the paint along the edges of the forms is still visible. This softened line captures the luminescence of the smoldering metal, while it transforms the figure of the operator into a sketchy, somewhat undefined wedge bordered by bright outlines. In this indistinct form, the worker seems less a human agent than a part of the machinery. Similarly, in *Grünes Strahlen* (Green Glow) [Fig. 2.7], Hans-Wolfgang Schulz uses a similar concentration of lighter tones to set off a group of workers clustered around a furnace. Here the composition is more tightly framed so that the viewer sees only the masked faces and hooded bodies of the three workers. One figure turns toward the furnace; his back is outlined and contrasts sharply with the bright, consistent light that fills the center of the picture. Schulz' freely-rendered masked figures lend an eerie quality to the work. These workers, though prominent within the composition, remain anonymous, estranged from the viewer by their otherworldly appearance and their ambiguous relationship to the machine.

Hermann Ratjen's watercolor, *Im Röhrenwerk* (In the Pipe Factory) [Fig. 2.8], is more precise and controlled in its rendering of workers and machinery in a vast, open hall. And yet, as in Schulz's work, the relationship of the human figures to the rest of the composition is ambiguous within Ratjen's depiction of the wide space of a factory interior. He sets the horizon low, which allows the grid of the building's support structure to dominate the composition. Crisscrossing girders form a pattern of positive and negative space whose complexity contrasts sharply with the planar surfaces and

geometric forms in the lower third of the work and thus draws the viewer's attention away from the machines and the figures. A series of shaded circular shapes representing the ends of the large steel pipes manufactured in the factory divides the two sections of the picture. Ratjen barely differentiates the different parts of the large turbine from one another, so that the largest, most central piece of machinery in the picture is little more than a dark mass in the background of the picture. And, to an even greater extent than in the previous two examples, Ratjen severely reduces the human presence: the tiny men he depicts hoisting the pipes into place are rendered as flat, geometric figures, and as such are nearly absorbed by the planar arrangement of the foreground.

The most reductive example of a factory interior in the juried works is a drawing by Brigitte Meier-Denninghoff, *Die Walzstraße* (Rolling Belt) [Fig. 2.9]. While the focus of my discussion is painting, this images is important to address because it is the most abstracted of all the works reproduced in the juried section.[230] Whereas my previous examples have emphasized the overall structure of the factory and/or the workers' interaction with the machinery, Denninghoff's picture ignores the larger context of the factory and its workers altogether. Instead the artist isolates the steel rail and the production line along which it moves. The work is split along two slight diagonals which visually pull against one another: the bright, square contour of the steel, and the rounded, dark forms of the rollers. While Denninghoff's drawing remains representational, the limited reference and simplified forms of *Die Walzstraße* push towards abstraction in the

[230] Meier-Denninghoff is a sculptor, and this early drawing has many essential qualities of her mature work: a refined, smoothly geometric surface with a suggestion of movement through the slight bend in the rail. While more severly abstracted works were submitted and even won prizes, this was as radical as the catalog's editors would get in what they chose for reproduction. This choice, no doubt, had something to do with the politics surrounding the exhibition itself, as well as the broader climate of stylistic conflict in West Germany at the time.

strictest sense, the steel apparently floating along under its own power. Denninghoff's work is unique among those reproduced in the catalog because its tight focus and isolation of the subject mean that the steel and the belt provide the entire context of the work.[231] The artist does not depict human activity within the factory, but rather machinery which works independently.

These four pictures are evidence of a predominance of reductive abstract or expressive styles among the juried works in *Iron and Steel's* catalog. These artists' treatments, in turn, produce an ambivalence towards the worker in the factory setting. In certain ways this thematic ambivalence recalls the ambiguous representations of the Post-Expressionist painters and photographers of the 1920s and 1930s, many of whom used the subject of the factory, rendered in stark detail, as a central theme of modern German life.[232] In formal terms, however, there is little relationship between the pre- and postwar

[231] In this regard, the overall composition of the drawing evokes the close focus used by Albert Renger-Patzsch in his industrial photographs of the 1920s and 1930s, which are characterized by an emphasis on machines and a lack of human presence. As a professional photographer, Renger-Patzsch photographed factories and mines in the industrial corridor along the Rhine and Ruhr rivers from the middle of the 1920s. His professional work funded various personal publishing projects, most notably the 1928 book *Die Welt ist Schön* (The World is Beautiful), in which he juxtaposed photographs of nature with photographs of industry. This volume has become an influential work in the history of twentieth-century photography. See Ann and Jurgen Wilde and Thomas Weski, eds., *Albert Renger-Patzsch: Photographer of Objectivity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

[232] Post-Expressionism, New Objectivity, and Magic Realism are all terms which date from the mid-1920s, when German art critics and historians began to try to codify the new work that was emerging after the apparent death of Expressionism as a style. Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, director of the Kunsthalle in Mannheim, mounted an exhibition called *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) in 1925 and had suggested the term some two years before while preparing the show. Hartlaub distinguished between two groups within New Objectivity, a left and a right, the first "veristic" and socially critical (including George Grosz and Otto Dix), the second "classicistic" and idealizing (including Alexander Kanoldt and Georg Schrimpf). In 1925, roughly parallel to Hartlaub's work, the critic Franz Roh surveyed Post-Expressionist tendencies in European art in his book *Nach-Expressionismus* (Post-Expressionism). Roh uses the terms "Post-Expressionism" and "Magical Realism" largely interchangeably, though Hartlaub's terminology has become standard and Roh's "Magical Realism" is now generally used to refer only to work such as the fantastic landscapes of the painter Franz Radziwill. See Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus – Magischer Realismus. Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925); Wieland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit und Magischer Realismus in Deutschland 1918-1933* (Hannover: Fackelträger-Verlag Schmidt-Küster GmbH, 1969); Jutta Hülsewig-Johnen, *Neue Sachlichkeit – Magischer Realismus* (Bielefeld: Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 1990); Dennis Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism. The Art*

pictures. A comparison of Hermann Ratjen's *In the Pipe Factory*, with its emphasis on the structure of the factory building [see Fig. 2.8] and the hyper-realistic *Weiße Röhren* (White Pipes) painted by Carl Grossberg in 1933 [Fig. 2.10] demonstrates the difference between the older and newer styles. Grossberg's factory interiors are intricate compositions made up of intertwining pipes, ventilation shafts, and girders rendered with subtle tonal shifts and crisply-defined edges.[233] Ratjen's *In the Pipe Factory*, on the other hand, does not provide the kind of cool, scrutinizing observation common to Grossberg's painting. Instead of precisely reproducing the details of the factory, Ratjen reduces the building's framework to a geometric schematization.[234] Indeed, the majority of the works in the juried section of the catalog, as exemplified by these four paintings and Bischoff's *Lokomotive*, are painted in a more expressive and abstracted mode than was typical of the Post-Expressionist painting of the interwar period.[235]

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of the Great Disorder 1918-1924 (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

[233] Grossberg's work is especially interesting because he was one of few post-Expressionist artists to depict factory interiors (most artists concentrated on exteriors), many of which he painted on commission from various industries in the 1920s and 1930s. Ingeborg Güssow notes that in Grossberg's interiors, a single feature such as the *Yellow Tank* itself is framed or positioned within the composition in such a way that it appears almost monumental, a feature I have identified below in several of the works used by the sponsoring corporations in their *Iron and Steel* advertisements. See Ingeborg Güssow, "Malerei der Neuen Sachlichkeit," in *Kunst und Technik in den 20er Jahren. Neue Sachlichkeit und Gegenständlicher Konstruktivismus* (München: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1980), 57-63.

[234] Overall, the works I have chosen to discuss as emblematic here make little reference to New Objectivity as a tradition or model. Even where the artist opts for a hard-edged depiction of the object, as is the case in Denninghof's work, the lack of any other details and the general composition of the piece detract from the clarity of the rendering, and in the end the work is not descriptive in the same way that the paintings of the New Objectivity were. All four of the artists who made the examples I use here seem to have been more concerned with abstracting their subjects, for example through schematized forms and by allowing edges to bleed into one another, rather than in exaggerating the clarity of the object, as was often the case in the post-Expressionist painting of the 1920s. Here, as elsewhere in the 1950s, Expressionism seems a more ready model than New Objectivity.

[235] Given that some painters and photographers of the New Objectivity, like Renger-Patzsch and Grossberg, were commissioned by corporations to depict factories and machinery, it is possible that, in 1952, the sponsors of *Iron and Steel* continued to expect that kind of representational recognizability. In comparison to Renger-Patzsch's and Grossberg's sober styles, even works like Luckenbach's, Schulz', Ratjen's, and Meier-Denninghoff's, which are basically figuratively rendered, might have seemed "removed from reality."

And yet, as I have discussed in these examples, the juried images remain largely readable. Perhaps the problem these pictures posed, then, was not simply that they were incomprehensible to workers who were "sensitive to nature," or that the artists who made them were "too far removed from reality."[236] Perhaps the sponsors were provoked not by the works' relative degrees of abstraction, but by the compositional strategies I have described above, all of which favored neither the worker nor the machine. In the juried examples, the artists offer ambivalent depictions of the factory and the worker; they neither celebrate nor criticize the conditions of modern industrial production or the role of the worker in that system.[237] Workers in these images are absorbed into or overpowered by the rest of the picture (or left out entirely, as in Denninghoff's drawing). They become indistinguishable from other objects in the compositions, to the extent that the worker is neither dominant nor even an agent, but simply one part of a larger whole. These artists also do not privilege the specific situation of the machine. They avoid any analytical or naturalistic approach toward technical specifications, and they use modern manufacturing processes as vehicles for subjective expression. For example, the light of the furnace is a dramatic element in *Green Glow*, while the girder system serves as an organizing principle in *In the Pipe Factory*. As a joint representation of industry, then, the juried works offer neither the heroic nor romantic interpretations of their subjects that Schulze-Vellinghausen observed among the works in the sales exhibition.

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[236] "Ein roter Klecks," 32-33.

[237] This is another distinction that separates this postwar work from many similarly-theme images of the in the expressive left-wing art of the interwar period, in which the hardships of the worker and the tyrannical nature of the machine are common subjects. Artists such as George Grosz, Alice Lex-Nerlinger, Otto Nagel, Oskar Nerlinger, Georg Scholz, and Karl Völker concentrated on the situation of the worker in industry. For an overview of the work of these artists, see Güssow, "Malerei der Neuen Sachlichkeit" and "Die Malerei des Gegenständlichen Konstruktivismus," in *Kunst und Technik in den 20er Jahren*.

The Advertisements

Confronted with what they considered to be an unacceptable representation of their enterprises, the corporate sponsors of *Iron and Steel* presented their own understanding of the image of industry in the sales exhibition. In the catalog, a similar purpose is served by the third section, which contains the sponsors' advertisements and which accounts for more than half of the total pages in the catalog.[238] These advertisements incorporate full-color reproductions of paintings, sculptures, sketches, and photographs, many of which are identified as part of the art collections of the sponsoring corporations. Of these ads, most are single-page, but a few are two-page spreads. Some are subdued in their design and are limited to a depiction of the company's product, while others are quite complex, with extensive texts narrating company histories or illustrating the persistence of technical and even artistic traditions in the company's current endeavors. The use of color in the advertisements is particularly striking given that the catalog's reproductions of the juried works are in black and white; the exhibited works literally pale in comparison to those used in the ads. Certainly the strategy of incorporating artworks into the advertisements reinforces the overall mission behind *Iron and Steel*, the cooperation between industry and art. But these advertisements also make a clear statement about the nature of that cooperation by employing consistent subject matter and a consistent mode of representation.[239] The production techniques and equipment of steel manufacturing figure prominently, as does a naturalistic style in which both machinery and the factory building as an architectural whole are simultaneously

[238] Each of the 62 sponsoring companies placed an advertisement, some over two pages, for a total of 83 pages, compared to the essay portion's 73 pages and the 34 pages of historical and contemporary the illustrations.

[239] There is one notable exception to this rule. The advertisement of the Borsig corporation in Berlin incorporates an almost entirely abstracted oil sketch of a foundry ladle by an artist named Wippermann.

monumentalized and romanticized. The marketing departments responsible for composing these advertisements no doubt chose the artworks they did because these works temper technological details with sentimentality; that is, the pictures offer emotionally laden images of industry. In each ad I discuss below, a painting functions as a component in the creation of a single, coherent message, one which is repeated in all of the ads.

The dominant mixture of the monumental and the specific is established in the very first advertisement, a full-page, partially colorized photograph of cast steel moving through a press [Fig. 2.11]. The two angular metal cylinders are tinted a reddish gold, and the color bleeds slightly beyond their outlines. The rest of the picture—the machine and the building's interior—remains monochromatic and in hard focus, very like a model in an industrial equipment catalog. If the small spot of color emphasizes the steel cylinder, the greater emphasis is on the machine, which is framed so that it fills the entire picture. With little surrounding context, its actual size is unclear. There are no human figures in this photograph that could provide a humanized sense of scale, although the stairway that leads up and over the press might indicate its approximate size. The ad uses no descriptive text; instead, the machine's own stamped insignia, "DEMAG," provides the necessary information about the manufacturer and sponsor. In effect, the ad's reliance on information contained within the photo establishes the machine itself as a powerful component that functions autonomously. The close focus and lack of human actors resembles the approach used by Meier-Denninghoff in *Rolling Belt*, but where that drawing generalizes its subject, the Demag photograph offers a precise record of the details of both machine and process. Indeed, the Demag image should be understood in

terms of industrial photography, which from the early twentieth century was used by manufacturers to record the details and specifications of their products.[240]

Within *Iron and Steel's* catalog the first image sets up the first of two major visual tropes that reappear throughout the advertisement section. In the Demag photograph, the machine is made heroic through its centrality in the composition and by its scale, and in turn through the self-sufficiency which is implied by these two compositional strategies. The machines represented in the advertisements that follow this first example dominate the scenes in which they appear, almost to the extent that they command a bodily presence, so that images function almost like portraits of the machines. This is the case, for example, in an advertisement for the Hydraulik Corporation of Duisburg [Fig. 2.12]. Here a painting of a hydraulic press like the one pictured in the Demag advertisement fills the entire page, with the press itself occupying three quarters of the image. As in the Demag ad, the picture, in this case a painting signed in the bottom right with "W. Kramer," stands alone, and once again, the only visible text in the ad is contained within the picture: the embedded insignia "HYDRAULIK DUISBURG" is clearly visible on the front of the machine. And as in the first ad, the heroic nature of the machine is connoted by its sheer size and its compositional dominance, here reinforced by the inclusion of more of the surrounding space and a few human figures. The size of the workers relative

[240] This first advertisement may make use of a publicity photograph that the corporation used in other contexts, as well; the use of photographs and artworks was not exclusive to the *Iron and Steel* catalog. The 1952 volume of *Stahl und Eisen*, the newsletter of the Wirtschaftsvereinigung Eisen- und Stahlindustrie, features many advertisements that also make use of photo and art reproductions. The photograph may also not have been considered an "art" photograph at all by its owners. In its composition the photograph is perfectly in keeping with conventional industrial photography, such as that documented by Tenfelde in *Bilder von Krupp*. The relationship between industrial photography and the aethetic developed in the photographs of Albert Renger-Patzsch is worth noting in this regard. Renger-Patzsch partially derived his style from the impersonal, detached approach required of the industrial photographer, who is expected to record data rather than to interpret her subject. Renger-Patzsch, in turn, influenced the industrial photography of his time. His more aestheticizing composition strategies are perhaps at work in the Demag photograph. See Güssow, "Die neusachliche Fotografie," in *Kunst und Technik in den 20er Jahren*, 54-55 and Wilde and Weski, eds., *Albert Renger-Patzsch*.

to the press and the massive steel cylinder that projects from it also convey the autonomy of the machine. Although they hold tools and are nominally involved in the operation of the production line, the workers appear small and inconsequential next to the enormous machine. Importantly, in spite of the atmospheric steam that rises from the cylinder and swirls in the background of the painting, nothing obscures the view of the press itself. Each part is clearly rendered and the three-quarter view provides the most information possible about the machine's physical characteristics. This is a strategy similar to the compositional techniques of industrial photography already long-established in the 1950s, as a 1929 photograph of the Krupp factory in Essen by an unknown photographer illustrates [Fig. 2.13].[241]

Walter Hemming's painting *Schwere Presse in Hattingen* (Heavy Press at Hattingen) [Fig. 2.14], used by the Ruhrstahl Aktiengesellschaft (Ruhr Steel Corporation) in its advertisement, shares the motif of the Hydraulik press forming a very large metal cylinder.[242] As in the previous two examples, the machine fills most of the picture and it towers over the two workers who stand nearby. Behind the press, a blanket of steam nearly obscures the rest of the factory and reinforces the machine's dominant placement within the picture. This and the slight angle at which the artist observed the scene resemble the painting by Kramer used in the Hydraulik corporation's advertisement so closely that they might depict identical machines or the same factory interior [see Fig. 2.12]. In both cases, the orientation of the press and the pervasive steam produce images in which the machine appears monumental and autonomous.[243]

[241] Reproduced in Tenfelde, *Bilder von Krupp*, 311.
[242] The brand name is barely visible on the face of the machine.
[243] In terms of the press' relative position and scale in the picture, the composition of this image has some similarities to Carl Grossberg's *White Pipes* [See Fig. 2.10]. But in contrast to Grossberg's hard-edged

In the Ruhrstahl advertisement, Hemming's *Heavy Press* is paired with a second work by the same artist in a two-page spread [Fig. 2.15]. The second painting reproduced here, *Hochofenanlage in Hattingen* (Blast Furnaces at Hattingen) [Fig. 2.16], combines the heroic machine with a second visual trope common among *Iron and Steel's* advertisements, the romantic factory landscape. Against a orange-toned sky and ground, the blast furnaces form a wide vertical block in the center of the picture, and once again tiny human figures clustered below the structure provide a reference point for its size. Billowing steam from a locomotive in the lower left and smoke from the furnaces themselves form a soft foil to the hard geometric rendering of the factory. The overall diffuse, golden color of the scene and the atmospheric steam and smoke that frame the furnaces evoke the mist and clouds of romantic landscape painting. A narrow band of text runs across the bottom of the two pages of the Ruhrstahl ad and identifies the sponsor in capital letters and the company's locations and products in smaller type. The images are large and take up most of the printable space on the pages. But some blank space is preserved around the two reproductions, a layout which mimics the organization of the juried work in the previous section of the catalog. This strategy of imitating the juried pictures' layout is further reinforced by the addition of the artist's name at the top of the left page, and the titles of the paintings beneath their images. The catalog-style design of the Ruhrstahl ad inserts a particular type of industry picture into the rest of the catalog's narrative; it invests the pictures within the advertisement with a value equivalent to that of the juried work.

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depiction, Hemming's rendering of the press is not precise. Hemming's rendering is atmospheric; the brushwork softens the area around the machine, especially in the lower left of the picture, where the outlines of the machine nearly disappear.

This same strategy of mimicking the juried pictures' orientation on their pages is at work in the advertisement of the Rheinische Kalksteinwerke Wulfrath (Rhinish Lime Works in Wulfrath) [Fig. 2.17]. This ad makes use of a painting by an unnamed artist in which the connection between the factory and the West German landscape is underlined through the pairing of industry and agriculture. In the foreground, a woman in peasant dress walks through a newly-mown hayfield, her traditional clothing linking her to the farm buildings in the middle of the picture. The archaic country scene evoked by these elements in the foreground contrasts with the factory that fills the background with silos, furnaces, and smokestacks, suggesting a merging of tradition and innovation. This composition also assumes that the idyllic atmosphere of the foreground carries over to the background, that is, that the factory has been absorbed into local traditions. The accompanying ad copy attempts to extract this particular message from the image and to apply it to the Rhinish Lime Works, asserting that the company fosters "a closer relationship between the employees and the factory" through "an extensive program of housing construction, leisure opportunities, and additional training for employees."[244] The text reiterates the painting's visual suggestion that the local population will be nurtured and industry's charitable legacy preserved by the beneficent presence of the factory.

The catalog-style layout is at its most apparent in the advertisement placed by the Hüttenwerk Oberhausen AG (Steelworks of Oberhausen Inc.). In *Industrielandschaft bei Oberhausen* (Industrial Landscape Near Oberhausen) [Fig. 2.18], by Heinz Weber, the artist employs a strategy similar to that of the anonymous artist of the Rheinische

[244] See Kuratorium Kunstausstellung Eisen und Stahl, *Eisen und Stahl* (the section of advertisements is unpaginated).

Kalksteinwerke image by merging traditional life and industrial modernity. Weber depicts a deep green landscape stretches to the middle distance, where remnants of the area's agricultural heritage remain, including a farm, indicated by a grove of trees and a few buildings, and a small village clustered along a road. At the boundary of the green countryside that takes up bottom third of the composition, an industrial complex spreads along the low horizon. The vast sky over this landscape is suffused from the left with gold-tinged smoke that rises from the mills. Weber's emphasis on the sky, which fills the upper two thirds of the composition, is a distinctly romantic approach rendered with an indeterminate light source and layers of feathery brushwork. Its composition, especially the immense sky, recalls the work of Caspar David Friedrich, in which the landscape was closely tied with German national identity.[245] Weber, like Friedrich, invests his painting with a regional character by depicting features specific to that area. He asserts the merging of the traditional life of the industrial area around the Rhine and Ruhr rivers, the *Ruhrgebiet*, with the modern industry that changed the face of that region. Here the normally polarized conditions of the agrarian economy and industrialization become one, redefining the character of the landscape.

The overall layout of the page here forces the idea of landscape and industry into the visual narrative of the catalog. Weber's picture fills the top two-thirds of the Oberhausen ad, while in the remaining space below, the title and artist's name are printed in a discrete caption that resembles those in the section of juried works even more closely

[245] This is the case, for example, in Friedrich's Monk by the Sea (1809-1810) in which the lone figure of the monk is dwarfed by the vastness of the sky. The pale beige color of the undulating rock on which the monk stands is typical of the chalk cliffs of the island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea, a landscape unique to the coast of Germany. Friedrich makes use of a similarly vast and dramatic sky in *Moonrise over the Sea* (1822); both paintings are in the collection of the National Gallery in Berlin. See, for example Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) and Werner Hofmann, *Caspar David Friedrich* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

than the two-page Ruhrstahl ad does with its incorporation of Hemming's two paintings. Here again, the sponsor's name stands alone at the bottom of the page, deemphasizing the commercial nature of the advertisement while underlining the painting's artistic qualities. As in the Ruhrstahl ad, this format allows the corporate advertisement to put forth an alternative to the representations of industrial subjects presented by *Iron and Steel's* juried exhibition.

This display strategy underlines the contrast within the catalog between the juried and commercial works, just as *Iron and Steel's* sales exhibition stood in opposition to its juried exhibition. The imitation of the catalog layout indicates that at least some of the sponsors viewed their purchased space in the advertisement section as an opportunity to confront the representation of industry put forth by *Iron and Steel's* juried pictures. And at least one of the sponsors strove to promote this carefully structured identity beyond the exhibition, as well. The two advertisements placed by different divisions of the Mannesmann Corporation, each in a two-page format, include separately mounted color plates of oil sketches by Richard Gessner [Fig. 2.19] and Sven Anker Lindström [Fig. 2.20]. The works are quite different formally. In his sketch, Gessner reduces the architectural details of the steel mill so that the composition is heavily geometric and dominated by the cylindrical forms of tanks and pipes. These simplified forms fill the picture, their relative size indicated by two small, schematically-rendered figures in the left middle ground. Lindström's work, a busy harbor scene, is more dynamic: both the cargo ship and the crane that hoists a load of pipes onto it extend into the upper portion of the composition. The legs and hand of a man loom large in the foreground of the image. His strangely foreshortened body connotes movement, which is reinforced by the rough

brushwork in which it, and the rest of the sketch, is rendered. Printed underneath the plates in both ads is a cordially-phrased offer from Mannesmann to provide a "complimentary, high-quality, full-size reproduction" of the work to anyone requesting it. By making reproductions freely available to the catalog's readers, Mannesmann's advertising executives went a step further in using contemporary art to shape the public representation of their corporate identity.

CONCLUSIONS: IRON AND STEEL'S COMPETING IMAGES

> [Adolph Menzel's *Iron Rolling Mill*] reproduces technical procedures with due precision: the machine shop with its cranes, furnaces, and flywheels. But its focal point is the representation of the human being, both at work and at rest. Today, however, as this exhibition shows, technical details nearly always come to the fore. Today blast furnaces, cranes, and flywheels dominate the image. The Romantic period was spellbound by the notion that the human being was the plaything of higher powers, a belief which brought forth both horror and bliss. In the present day this has become a genuine attitude towards life. We are, in every respect, the heirs of the Romantic epoch.
>
> Martin Rabe, *Die Zeit*, 15. May 1952[246]

Glancing through the advertising section of the *Iron and Steel* catalog, it is easy to forget that the exhibition took place in 1952, and not 1942. Nearly every painting reproduced in these ads is executed in a naturalistic style reminiscent of that demanded by the National Socialists, and the motifs which appear in most of the ads could easily have been found in a National Socialist exhibition or art periodical. This can be illustrated by comparing the images that were used in the advertisements with two paintings from 1940, both of which were shown in that year's *Great German Art Exhibition* in Munich: *Ausspritzen einer Gießpfanne* (Spraying Out a Foundry Ladle)

[246] Martin Rabe, "Kunstausstellung *Eisen und Stahl,*" *Die Zeit*, 15. May 1952. Reprinted in Dieter Ruckhaberle et al., *Karl Hofer, 1878-1955*. (Berlin: Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin, 1978), 702.

[Fig. 2.21] by Leonhard Sandrock, and *Hochöfen im Bau* (Blast Furnaces Under Construction) by Franz Gerwin [Fig. 2.22]. In these two images, the artists present monumental, romanticized depictions of machinery and industrial architecture in much the same way that Kramer, Hemming, and Weber do in the paintings I have discussed above.[247] Sandrock depicts the foundry ladle as one component of a sublime machine so massive that it extends beyond the picture. Gerwin renders the factory emerging from a curtain of smoke and steam so that the mill takes on the mystery and romance of Friedrich's ruined cathedrals. In the National Socialist context, these sentimental renderings characterized the factory building and the activities performed within it as sacred to the German *Volk*. Although industrial images like Sandrock's and Gerwin's comprised a relatively small proportion of the works at the Nazi's *Great German Art Exhibitions*, views of men working in factories, the expansion of Germany's roadways, and the construction of bridges and dams were construed as patriotic subjects just as military and genre scenes were.[248] These subjects, like images of soldiers, German mothers, and even Hitler himself were an important component in the creation of a visual vocabulary which both engendered and reinforced the ideas of the Third Reich.[249]

As Schulze-Vellinghausen points out in his review of the show, the similarities between the works at *Iron and Steel's* sales exhibition and National Socialist art were

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[247] Gerwin and Sandrock were interviewed, along with Richard Gessner, for the industry newsletter *Das Werk* in October 1940, the same issue in which a historical overview of the German industry picture was published. "Wie ich Industriemaler wurde." *Das Werk*, vol. 20 October 1940: 199-200 and Dr. R. Kutsch, "Das deutsche Industriebild." *Das Werk*, vol. 20 October 1940: 191-198.

[248] For brief overviews, see Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1992) and Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979). A much more substantial survey can be found in Mortimer G. Davidson, *Kunst in Deutschland, 1933-1945: eine wissenschaftliche Enzyklopädie der Kunst im Dritten Reich* (Tübingen: Grabert, 1991).

[249] See Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004) and Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art As Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

undeniable, and yet this association apparently did nothing to diminish the popularity of these styles and subjects among the exhibition's sponsors. This tacit acceptance of the art of National Socialism is further complicated by the fact that a number of the artists featured in *Iron and Steel's* advertisements were active and successful during the Nazi period.[250] The work of the painter Richard Gessner underscores this continuity. Gessner exhibited numerous times at the annual *Great German Art Exhibitions*, and his work was reproduced in surveys of German art in the early 1940s, two facts which indicate the extent of his integration into the National Socialist system.[251] But in 1952, Gessner had the unusual distinction of being the only artist whose work appears in both the section of juried artworks and in a sponsor's advertisement. In all three contexts—National Socialism, *Iron and Steel's* juried exhibition, and its ads—Gessner's paintings depict exterior views of German steel mills and factories. The two paintings by the artist that are reproduced in the catalog are closely-cropped and rendered so that the detail of the industrial structures is reduced to geometric forms, as I have discussed above. But beyond these general formal similarities, the two works interpret the West German factory very differently. The untitled composition printed in the Mannesmann advertisement [see Fig. 2.19] depicts a working factory: smoke or steam is visible in the far right background, and the two tiny figures in the middle ground are depicted in action,

[250] Two examples stand out: a painting by Ria Picco-Rückert, whose work appeared at the 1944 Great German Art Exhibition, is used in the ad placed by the Hüttenwerk Haspe Aktiengesellschaft. *Hochöfen an der Ruhr* by Dirk van Hees, whose work was published in Wilhelm Rüdiger's *Kunst und Technik* (Munich: Verlag der deutschen Technik, 1941), appeared in the ad placed by the Eisenwerke Mülheim/Meiderich.
[251] See for example Wilhelm Rüdiger, *Kunst und Technik* (Munich: Verlag der deutschen Technik, 1941) plate 38. Because work was chosen for the Munich exhibitions by one person, the photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, who was given this responsibility by Hitler directly, inclusion in the shows was an indication that a work met National Socialism's standards for German art. This does not necessarily mean that artists who showed in Munich were party members. But their participation in the Munich exhibitions is, at the very least, proof of a lack of critical engagement with the dictatorship, in which art played an incredibly vital role. See Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, 70.

attending to some part of the structure, perhaps a valve or chute. In contrast, Gessner's juried work, *Demontiert* (Dismantled) [Fig. 2.23], is a depiction of a factory which has been taken apart, presumably as part of the larger dismantling project of the Allies in Germany's western industrial centers.[252] Here two workers, again in the lower left, are depicted frontally with their arms flat against their sides. The remnants of the factory are stacked in heaps, filling the space with schematized building components such as girders, pipes, and ductwork, all of which are several times the size of the two figures. The difference between Gessner's two images is that one factory works, and one does not.

The presence of Gessner's images in both the catalog's sections of juried art and in the advertisements suggests an additional conclusion that could be drawn from the conflicting images of industry that arose in the context of *Iron and Steel*. Gessner's double role hints that perhaps there was not always a clear distinction between the representations promoted by West German industry and those chosen by the artist-academics who served on *Iron and Steel's* jury. This grey area surfaces in the comments of the reviewer who observed that whereas Adolph Menzel's "focal point is the representation of the human being, both at work and at rest," at *Iron and Steel*, "blast furnaces, cranes, and flywheels dominate the image."[253] What is unclear from this assessment is whether the critic refers to the juried works or to those rescued by the committee for the sales exhibition. Perhaps he means to indicate that in fact there is an underlying connection between the two, a common attitude towards industry, present in both modern (expressively figurative or abstract) works and more conservative, naturalistic works, in which the human worker is radically diminished as an agent.

[252] See Wiesen, *West German Industry*, 73.
[253] Rabe, "Kunstausstellung *Eisen und Stahl,*" 702.

Overall, however, these two representations of industry compete with one another in *Iron and Steel's* catalog. Through the formatting of the page and the formal characteristics of the paintings they utilize, the advertisements placed by *Iron and Steel's* sponsors work together to create a catalog within the catalog, a record of works that reflect the preferences of the sponsors. Whether or not the worker was in fact "sensitive to nature," as the public relations official maintained, clearly the Trade Association of Iron and Steel Manufacturers preferred pictures in which industry appeared productive and nearly self-sufficient. In the competition between images of within the catalog's historical section, its section of juried works, and the section of advertisements, the image of the advertisements is the one that triumphs.

Chapter Three: The Elusive Socialist Realist Image and the *Third German Art Exhibition* (1953).

Stepping confidently away from the open door of a prison cell, a Soviet soldier grasps the arm of a German prisoner. The slightly elevated gazes and firmly set mouths of the two men depicted in Werner Ruhner's etching *Achter Mai, 1945* (*Eighth of May, 1945*) [Fig. 3.1] suggest that these two figures move forward with a common purpose. Ruhner's picture is a commemoration of the day the Red Army took Berlin, but his depiction of the German as a prisoner renders the Soviet not just as a liberator but also as the superior of the German. This is the first illustrated work in the catalog of the 1953 *Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (*Third German Art Exhibition*), a fact that tells us something about the intentions of the catalog's authors.[254] With Ruhner's image of Soviet liberation as its opener, the catalog becomes a document of German-Soviet cooperation. Standing in for the rest of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the German prisoner declares his readiness to follow the example of the Soviet Union, represented here by the Soviet soldier. The *Third German Art Exhibition* thus becomes an opportunity to demonstrate East Germany's emulation of Soviet culture, specifically to show that German artists had begun making socialist art modeled after that of the Soviets. As

[254] While a few works from the *Third German Art Exhibition* were reproduced in color in the journal *bildende kunst*, the works illustrated in the catalog are printed in black and white. This necessarily limits my discussion of those works, but does not diminish the significance of other formal aspects, nor does it negatively effect my assessment of the catalog as a whole.

expressed by Ruhner's etching, East Germans walked hand-in-hand with the Soviets, on metaphorical equal footing, but with the Soviets firmly in control.[255]

Two works which follow a few pages later in the catalog reinforce this idea. One, a painting by Rudolf and Fritz Werner entitled *Freundschaft* (*Friendship*) [Fig. 3.2], shows a group of four boys gathered around a Soviet soldier perched in the doorframe of a transport truck; one of the boys appears to be in the midst of telling a story, gesticulating enthusiastically to the indulgent-looking soldier. On the facing page, Karl Kuhn's painting *Ski Reparatur* (*Ski Repair*) [Fig. 3.3] also addresses the subject of German youth under the protection of the Soviets; this time a soldier examines a child's broken ski binding in a snow-covered forest. In addition to the sentimentality of the subject matter of these three images of Soviet-German cooperation [see Figs. 3.1-3.3], they all share a descriptive representational style which leaves little open to the interpretation of the viewer. Their message, beyond the individual stories depicted in each genre scene, is clear. The Soviets were responsible for freeing the Germans from the grip of fascism, and Soviets remain committed to the GDR, a dedication which is indispensable to the success of German socialism. But the simultaneously deferential and self-confident tone of the catalog's first few images does not reflect the reality of the *Third German Art Exhibition* itself. Instead of "inspiring the human spirit to develop its most noble qualities" as the catalog suggests, the exhibition was mired in stylistic confusion and hampered by the unresolved legacy of National Socialist representation.[256]

[255] Although the image is ideal for the purpose of setting up the catalog's ideological narrative, Ruhner's etching does not appear in the catalog's list of works, suggesting that the image was added to the catalog at the last minute.
[256] Helmut Holtzhauer, *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953), n.p.

The *German Art Exhibitions*, East Germany's national art shows, were held in Dresden in approximately four-year intervals, the first in 1946, the tenth and last in 1987. The first exhibition, organized and hosted by the Soviet occupation authority, featured artists who had been targeted by the National Socialists. The majority of works in the 1949 show had been made between 1933 and 1945, thus supporting the organizers' claims that the Nazi project of destroying modern art in Germany had been unsuccessful.[257] This important exhibition symbolically declared the return of artistic freedom to Germany, enlisting the participation of prominent German art professionals and artists who had been unable to work under National Socialism, including Will Grohmann, Karl Hofer, Max Beckmann, and Ernst Wilhelm Nay.[258] Both artists and organizers came from all of Germany's occupied zones.[259]

The 1946 exhibition was ideologically neutral, at least in the sense of inter-zonal politics between East and West. By the second exhibition in 1949, however, the goal of the Dresden exhibitions had become expressly political. The 1949 show, now called the *Second German Art Exhibition*, happened to open in the midst of Germany's formal division into two separate states. The organizers intended this exhibition to be representative of contemporary art in all of Germany, and it included works by roughly half East and half West German artists. But the organizers tried to design the show to reflect the cultural goals of East Germany, the new German "worker and farmer State."

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[257] Gabriele Saure, "Die II. Deutsche Kunstausstellung Dresden 1949. Der Ausgang für den kompromißlosen Kampf um eine realistische deutsche Kunst," in *Kunst und Sozialgeschichte*, Martin Papenbrock, ed. (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlaggesellschaft, 1995), 347.

[258] Ibid. Saure argues that the 1946 Dresden exhibition "did not yet have as its purpose the concrete illustration of a particular type of socialism, nor did it attempt to cloak extra-artistic demands with a cultural aura."

[259] This was true with the exception of the British zone, which experienced some sort of shipping difficulties. See Corinna Halbrehder, *Die Malerei der Allgemeinen Deutschen Kunstausstellung/ Kunstausstellung der DDR 1-VIII* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 28-30.

The exclusively East German jury included an advisory group consisting of four workers, a farmer, and one young person whose participation would help ensure that the exhibition included artworks relevant to the socialist state's most valued citizens.[260] But in spite of the presence of these token representatives of German socialism, there were few works in the final show that depicted a new socialist reality in the sense preferred by the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) leadership. Instead, as Corinna Halbrehder notes, the large number of self-portraits at the 1949 exhibition suggested a continuing need among German artists to take stock of their own individual situations after the war, and the many depictions of carnivals, fairs, and circuses revealed an equally strong desire to indulge in representations of the few more frivolous aspects of postwar life.[261] The SED had hoped that the advice of Soviet artists and cultural politicians would ease the introduction of socialist realism into the GDR. But the *Second German Art Exhibition* suggested that there would be no easy translation of Soviet socialist realism into a German idiom. Images of subjects like the rebuilding of East German cities, the communalization of farmland, and worker solidarity were in the minority at the 1949 show, proof that the East German Party had failed to persuade artists to take up realist form and socialist content. Still, even artists who enthusiastically followed the Party's recommendations in terms of content had trouble putting into practice the often vague prescriptions made by SED and Soviet officials regarding form.

[260] Halbrehder, 48.
[261] Ibid., 52.

SOCIALIST REALISM AND THE FORMALISM DEBATE

Many of the German artists, writers, and political leaders who were responsible for shaping GDR arts policy in the early years had been introduced to socialist realism while in exile in the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s. After the war, they brought their experience of Soviet art to eastern Germany, encouraging those artists living in the Soviet-occupied zone to learn from Soviet socialist realism. Their sense of socialist realism was based on Andrei Zhdanov's declaration at the 1934 All-Union Conference of Soviet Writers. Zhdanov, then Stalin's spokesperson for cultural matters, demanded that literature "depict reality in its revolutionary development," and produce works that were "attuned to the times." Zhdanov emphasized the ideas that had occupied the Soviet Union's revolutionary artists for a decade or more, in particular the didactic function of socialist realism, which would "shape and reeducate the working person in the spirit of Socialism."[262] While Zhdanov's pronouncement was originally meant to apply to literature, its core ideas reiterated earlier demands for revolutionary and socialist visual art. In the Soviet context, this signaled the dominance of naturalistic representation over that influenced by modernism. By the late 1930s, the official Soviet recommendation was that art be "realistic in form and socialist in content."[263] It was the application of this definition of socialist realism that East German politicians and artists debated in the 1950s.

[262] For the most complete English-language discussion of the development of socialist realism in the Soviet Union, see Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), especially 140-203.
[263] Aleksandr Gerasimov, 1939, Quoted in Bown, 141.

SED cultural politicians hoped that painting and sculpture would follow the Soviet model as closely as possible, reflecting everyday socialist reality by capturing typical, characteristic elements of daily life. Because socialism was still nascent in the GDR, however, the real task of the artist was to imagine the future, something which proved difficult for the SED to communicate in specific terms. Soviet and East German cultural officials quickly discerned that the most efficient way to clarify the goals and requirements of socialist realist practice was to specify what it was not. Predictably, the strategy employed by politicians, critics, and some artists in the GDR was essentially an imitation of the strategies of the Stalinist cultural program of the Soviet Union, in which the term "formalism" served as a catch-all designation for the opposite of socialist realist representation. Formalism as a concept was broad enough to include all modern art styles, whether fully abstract, Surrealist, or expressively representational. Like their Soviet counterparts, East German opponents of formalism criticized art which gave precedence to form over content, specifically to the extent that it "was not sufficiently related to the present and thus not close enough to the [sensibilities] of the public."[264] A Soviet cultural advisor to the GDR put it this way: "[A]ny German painter who attempts to produce [work] without the people, who does not share the life of the people, does not empathize with it or share its joys, who does not draw his own creative power from that of the people, that painter is damned to a miserable fate."[265]

Soviet and East German officials introduced the Soviet model of socialist realism to GDR artists gradually through a series of official resolutions and a number of highly

[264] Halbrehder, 59.
[265] Alexander Dymschitz, "Über die formalistische Richtung in der deutschen Malerei," *Tägliche Rundschau* 19./24.11.1948. Reprinted in Elimar Schubbe, ed., *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED Vol. 1: 1949-1970* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 97-103.

visible essays in East German policy journals and arts publications.[266] The so-called "formalism debate" which ensued as artists confronted the Party's requirements for artistic production has been discussed at length by a number of German art historians and artists.[267] Here I will offer an overview of those essays published before the *Third German Art Exhibition* in 1953 which represent the major tendencies of the debate. One of the earliest contributions, Max Grabowski's "On the Visual Arts of the Present," appeared in October 1947.[268] As head of the Division of Culture and Education in the Central Committee of the SED, Grabowski explains that "there is no such thing as unpolitical art" and reiterates the Party's need to determine which aspects of contemporary art are "progressive, and which prevent progress." While recognizing that modern art grew out of a revolutionary drive, he argues that the styles of Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism were ineffective in bringing a full-fledged revolution to pass. New Objectivity fares still worse in Grabowski's analysis; he claims that it emphasized naturalistic form at the expense of content and was thus romantic and archaic, "standing still, in effect taking a step backwards" and clearing the way for the superficial naturalism of the National Socialist period. Grabowski understood Surrealism, which had a strong

[266] Essays in national newspapers had a much wider audience, allowing the Party to popularize the issue of socialist representation, or at least to make the general public aware of the official position. Often the writers of these essays pointed out the failings of East German artists, drawing on the anti-modern attitudes and vocabulary which had been utilized by the National Socialists. This strategy likely made good use of the public's lingering hostility towards modern art, a phenomenon I have discussed in relation to West Germany in Chapters One and Two.

[267] Aside from the work of Halbrehder and Saure, the most important contributions to this scholarship are Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus. Die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001) and *Kunstdokumentation SBZ-DDR, 1945-1990*, edited by Günter Feist, Eckhart Gillen and Beatrice Vierneisel (Berlin: Museumspädagoischer Dienst, 1996). To my knowledge none of the existing treatments deal with the West German role at the *Third German Art Exhibition*, and only a few mention the obvious problem of naturalism and Nazi representation.

[268] Grabowski communicated the party line on art through numerous essays in the late 1940s. In one telling article, he linked artistic production to the SED's two-year plan, projecting that art would gradually increase in quantity and quality just as other production in the GDR did. See Max Grabowski, "Kulturschaffende und Wirtschaftsplan," *Neues Deutschland* 20.8.1948, quoted in Halbrehder, 40.

presence in the postwar German artworld, to be similarly problematic because of the Surrealist artists' inward-turning subjects and apparent lack of interest in socially relevant content.[269] Given these various failures, Grabowski determined that the major modern styles of the early twentieth century were not usable in the postwar German context. Instead, German socialism required progressive artwork which would "make a statement which is interesting and compelling to those people who belong to the active, sustaining elements of our time…"[270] Significantly, Grabowski does not describe how such a work would look, only that it would not resemble these modern styles.

Grabowski's 1947 essay marks the beginning of a heightened stage of art criticism which would continue largely unabated until the *Third German Art Exhibition* in 1953. His discussion introduces two significant theses. The first is the problem of formalism, which he defines in keeping with Soviet definitions as any style of artwork in which form appears to exist on its own, while content or subject matter is neglected by the artist. The second major thesis of Grabowski's essay, also integral to the Soviet conception of art in socialism, is the necessity of art's connection to contemporary society. Grabowski's essay drew assorted reactions from East Germany's artists, many of whom were eager to help determine the role of art in German socialism.[271] The most prominent response was a dialogue between the artists Karl Hofer and Oskar Nerlinger published in September and October of 1948 in the GDR's principal art journal *bildende*

[269] In contrast to the SED's understanding of Surrealism, that style was seen by many German artists (in East and West) as especially poignant in the postwar context in which buildings, lives, and belief systems lay in ruins. See Bernhard Schulz, ed., *Grauzonen, Farbwelten. Kunst und Zeitbilder 1945-1955* (Berlin: NGBK/Medusa, 1983),193.
[270] Max Grabowski, "On the Visual Arts of the Present," *Einheit*, October 1947.
[271] Ulrike Goeschen notes, for example, that declarations were made by some artists in support of the Party's position against formalist art, including a declaration against formalism by the artists of the SED's Berlin chapter in late September 1948. See Goeschen, 38.

kunst, which the two artists co-edited.[272] Hofer and Nerlinger express arguments for and against the political involvement of art in society, and their *bildende kunst* conversation neatly represents the opinions of many East German artists on the subject of art in socialist society.

Hofer would later become the founder and president of the *Deutscher Künstlerbund* in West Berlin, but in 1948 he divided his time between the eastern and western sectors of the city. The principles he tried to uphold as head of the *Künstlerbund* were at the core of his *bildende kunst* contribution, as well. Hofer believed that, after the war, art returned to the autonomous position it had held prior to National Socialism. He argued that art should be detached from politics and that it had no responsibilities toward larger society; in his *bildende kunst* essay he writes that the only goal of art remains "the depiction of the object at rest, of the human being…the peaceful beauty of flowers, fruit, and landscapes." Contradicting Grabowski's assertion that the art-for-art's-sake approach is antiquated and regressive, Hofer declares that art must remain self-determined, its "decisive factor the impulse from within, not from without." He insists that art must be sovereign: "Art can define the times, can be as political as it wishes, but this must occur in a manner in keeping with art's own laws."[273] At the same time, Hofer holds that the ultimate creative freedom of the artist does not mean a complete withdrawal from society. Rather, he asserts that great art "anticipat[es] the [spirit of the] time, even shaping it." Even if great art is "rarely comprehended by its contemporaries," Hofer suggests, art and society are integrally connected.

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[272] Both Nerlinger and Hofer were prominent artists and had been politically active during the Nazi period, Nerlinger as a member of the Communist Party and Hofer as a non-partisan but committed opponent of National Socialism. Ibid., 205.

[273] Hofer, Karl. "Kunst und Politik," in Gabriele Schultheiß, ed., *Zwischen Krieg und Frieden* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1980), 186.

In many ways, Oskar Nerlinger's response refutes Hofer's declaration of the sovereignty of art and artist. Like Grabowski, Nerlinger agrees that the various modern styles had been important in their own time, but were inappropriate in the contemporary context. He considers the Expressionists and Cubists to be worthy of respect because of their degradation under National Socialism, but faults those artists' isolation from society as a central weakness of modern art. However, Nerlinger stops short of blaming the modern artist for his tendency to cling to individualism in spite of his responsibility to remake society into a socialist reality; instead he asserts that the subjective artist continues in this pattern because it is all he knows. Reiterating Grabowski's assertion, Nerlinger writes that the artist must be retrained to see "that there can be no point of view without political consequences, that every behavior, even the 'apolitical,' has a political effect…"[274]

Shortly after the publication of the *bildende kunst* series the tone of the public discussion of formalism changed. In November 1948, the *Tägliche Rundschau*, the newspaper of the Soviet Administration in Germany, published the most aggressive assessment of East German art to that point: "On Formalist Tendencies Within German Painting," written by the head of the Cultural Division of the Soviet Military Government in Germany, Alexander Dymschitz.[275] Since this two-part essay circulated in a national newspaper, it considerably widened the audience for this discussion beyond the specialized audience of *bildende kunst* and provided the first high-profile Soviet assessment of German art. In it, Dymschitz takes a decidedly negative view of

[274] Oskar Nerlinger, "Politik und Kunst," in Schultheiß, 186.
[275] Alexander Dymschitz, "Über die formalistische Richtung in der deutschen Malerei," *Tägliche Rundschau* 19./24.11.1948. Reprinted in Elimar Schubbe ed., *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED Vol. 1: 1949-1970* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 97-103.

contemporary German painting, contending that it is dominated by formalist tendencies, that is, an "anti-natural contrast between 'complete' form and impoverished content." As he sees it, the situation in Germany reflects that of Western Europe as a whole, in which two types of formalist artists coexist: those who "belong organically to bourgeois decadence" and "those who stand politically in the camp of democracy and progress but who, in their work, succumb to the influence of reactionaries."

Dymschitz defines realism not as a "mechanical or photographic copy made by means of an empirical naturalism, but instead a constructive, analytical, realistic composition which is a synthesis of reality itself and the relationship of the artist to it." Overwhelmingly, however, his argument is constructed negatively, defining socialist realism by what it is *not*. He asserts that formalist painters ignore the most important aspect of art, the "rendering of the typical, the determination of the characteristic element" so that "the canvas becomes a projection of his emotions, a type of playground in which his fantasies can play freely." This type of art is "anti-realist" and "runs counter to nature." As the author lays out the shortcomings of formalism, he offers several additional negative examples, focusing on Karl Hofer in what was likely a response to Hofer's recent contributions to *bildende kunst*. For Dymschitz, Hofer embodies the three characteristics of the formalist artist: he favors form while ignoring content or ideas, he cultivates an individualistic or subjective position, and as a result, he succumbs to pessimism:

> The formalist position of [Karl Hofer] has led him into a tragic crisis. He is unbelievably neglectful of the world and the human being, the heart and most important object of art, because he allows himself to be dominated by a constant and monotonous mannerism…What person who truly lives in and with the times can recognize himself in the tragic masks of Karl Hofer? The stubbornness with which this painter cultivates his invented forms of falsified reality is the proof that

> in his art he turns his back on life and enters into a world of fantasies which, like all subjective fantasy, cannot stand up to the tests of life.[276]

Hofer's *Im Neubau* (*In the New Building*) [Fig. 3.4] is a good example of the formal approach and subject matter criticized by Dymschitz. In this 1947 painting, four figures cavort inside a room in the midst of renovation, as the ladder, workbench, and bucket suggest. The figure on the far left has removed his mask to reveal a cracked, bloodied skull; the mask he holds resembles the smooth, expressionless, faces of the two central figures, who therefore must be masked. The figure on the right, who moves away from the other three, is headless. The composition suggests dishonesty or artifice: the masks hide damaged heads, and the figures behave as if the crumbling building they dance in is whole and safe. Overall the mood of the painting is dreary, the cracks in the wall and the crack in the left figure's head mirroring one another to evoke a sense of widespread damage, both material and psychic. Hofer reveals the "New Building" to be an old, flawed structure whose cracks and instability will be covered up with plaster. In spite of Hofer's belief that the goal of art was the representation of "the peaceful beauty of flowers, fruit, and landscapes," much of his wartime and postwar works deal with the uglier realities of life in Germany's ruined cities: deceit, poverty, disorientation. Much like the work *Carnival Evening* (1951), for which Hofer won the first prize in painting at the 1951 Künstlerbund exhibition, *In the New Building* is typical of Hofer's grim assessment of the postwar situation. These are the masked faces and pessimism singled out by Dymschitz.

One last important critique which Dymschitz levels at the German formalists is their denial of Germany's artistic heritage. He writes that "formalist art stands in strong

[276] Ibid., 99.

contrast to the national traditions of German painting, which always distinguished itself through a high degree of idea-content…Classical German painting—Dürer and Grünewald, Bosch and Cranach and so on to Zille and Käthe Kollwitz—is painting filled with ideational passion." Yet, although Dymschitz does provide a few positive role models for German artists, his primary strategy is to define socialist realism in negative terms.[277] Using words like "irrational," "decadent," and "degenerate," Dymschitz's arguments were part of a common Soviet strategy at work to varying degrees since the revolution. But this terminology likely had a different resonance for his German readers, who had seen this same vocabulary used in the National Socialist defamation of modernism. Dymschitz's negative descriptive method, which was adopted by subsequent authors, was demonstrably troubling to the East German artists' community. For artists like Karl Hofer, who had lived through and suffered under National Socialism, this type of virulent negative critique inevitably recalled the denunciations common in Nazi art politics.[278] Indeed, Dymschitz's harsh criticism was the determining factor in Hofer's decision to leave East Germany for West Berlin.

With the Dymschitz letter, the voice of the Party on matters of art in the GDR took a decidedly anti-modernist turn, becoming virulent and formulaic, but remaining ultimately ineffective. The second Dresden exhibition in 1949 showed no substantial advances in the creation of socialist realist representation, which provoked the Party into devoting renewed attention to artists who continued to ignore its recommendations. In January 1951 the formalism debate reached another crescendo with the publication of

[277] Ibid.
[278] Bown indicates that this negative description had a precedent in early socialist realist practice, as in that of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia in the 1920s. "The formal qualities arising from the AKhRR concept of realism were not clearly defined. When it came to questions of form, AKhRR statements were most eloquent in what they rejected…Cézanne, Picasso, and Derain…" (88)

"The Paths and Missteps of Modern Art" by N. Orlow, a pseudonym for Vladimir Semyonovich Semyonov, a high-ranking Soviet official in the GDR.[279] Even in comparison to the Dymschitz letter, Orlow's essay employs a severe rhetoric. The author leaves no room for interpretation, repeating his key ideas in a rigid, pedantic style. The most important of these is that "some branches of the arts in the GDR still tend toward degeneracy and degradation, mysticism and symbolism, the preference for a contorted and incorrect representation of reality, as well as a flat and vulgar naturalism."[280] Orlow understands the struggle to eliminate formalism as nothing less than "a battle between a democratic and an anti-democratic movement."[281] For the author, formalism not only signals a loss of idea or content in art, but is evidence of cultural degeneracy.

Where Dymschitz limited himself to a few direct criticisms (primarily directed at Karl Hofer), Orlow devotes extensive space to the denunciation of a number of artists and broadens this assault to include all branches of the visual art establishment guilty of colluding in the degeneration of German art. The Academy of the Arts, the GDR's art periodicals, even the minister of education all come under attack for tolerating "decadent, unpatriotic, anti-democratic elements."[282] Orlow identifies a "crisis of the hideous" in contemporary German art and uses language even more direct than Dymschitz', his observations reading like explicit warnings to the artists of the GDR. He scolds, "One must not depict the worker-activists or those called by the working class and the people

[279] N. Orlow, "Wege und Irrwege der modernen Kunst," in *Tägliche Rundschau* 20 and 21. January 1951. From 1949-53 Semyonov was the advisor to the Soviet Control Commission in the GDR, and he subsequently held various other diplomatic positions, including Soviet ambassador to the Federal Republic from 1978-1986. For the history of Semyonov's involvement in GDR cultural politics, including the N. Orlow letter, see Werner Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen: Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschland von 1945 bis 2000* (Leipzig: 2001), 88-104.
[280] Orlow, "Wege und Irrwege der modernen Kunst," 20. January 1951.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.

to lead the new democratic state as deformed and primitive." He reinforces this injunction with a historical example, criticizing the early twentieth-century work of Käthe Kollwitz, whom many socialist artists saw as a model, asking "Is it so difficult to comprehend that such an attitude towards the working class and the workers of the GDR is wrong, and that it cannot serve the moral renewal of the German people?"[283]

As pointed as his criticisms are, Orlow is equally insistent about what constitutes an acceptable model for German artists. The "classical" German cultural heritage is a mandatory source, as is that of Russia and certain other European nations. The author provides an extensive list of models: Bach and Beethoven, Schubert and Wagner in music; Lessing, Goethe, Schiller in literature; the Holbeins, Menzel, and Dürer in the visual arts—even Monet and Renoir, "in spite of their incorrect philosophical views." Still, with all these models in mind, what Orlow considers crucial is that the artist (or writer or composer) remember that "art in the new Germany must represent reality in its new progressive, democratic development. [The artists] must take their themes from the battle of the workers for democracy and peace, the five-year-plan, the improvement of the life of the German people."[284] Orlow further calls on German artists to "direct their entire attention to the progressive people of contemporary Germany: the activists in the factories, the progressive intellectuals, the engineers, supervisors, farmers, functionaries of the Free German Youth, the Young Pioneers, etc." As a whole, the models, themes, and methods listed by Orlow in 1951 were not recommendations, but prescriptions delivered to the East German artist through one of Stalin's closest confidants. But in spite of their pedigree, they proved difficult to implement.

[283] Orlow, "Wege und Irrwege der modernen Kunst," 21. January 1951.
[284] Ibid.

AN EAST-WEST DYNAMIC: COOPERATION OR ANTAGONISM

Orlow's letter was in part a response to the failure of German artists at the *Second German Art Exhibition* in 1949 to present work which complied with the Party's narrow guidelines for socialist realism. This failure came in spite of the monumental scale of the show. A wide sampling of work from eastern and western artists was important to the show's authoritative character (its claim to be representative of German art), but in an internal report to GDR president Otto Grotewohl, Max Grabowski wrote that the sheer size of the exhibition meant the inclusion of more "formalist" artists than the organizers would have liked. Grabowski argued that the few realist works submitted were of "such low quality" that they had to be rejected by the jury, resulting in a surplus of "formalist" works.[285] Reviews of the 1949 show faulted West German painters in particular for clinging to so-called formalist traditions. But the inclusion of West German artists in the *German Art Exhibitions* was a crucial to the Party's demonstration of an all-German solidarity, and in any case most critics agreed that none of the participating artists, whether East or West German, showed signs of developing a socialist realist style.

Even with the increasing pressure on artists from Dymschitz, Semyonov, and other influential figures, the organizers of the third Dresden exhibition in 1953 felt it necessary to ensure that the lack of realist-type work of the 1949 show would not be repeated. They issued a specific call to members of the Union of Visual Artists to submit works which were "representational, closely tied to reality, and life-affirming" and which

[285] Max Grabowski, "Report on the Preparations for the Second German Art Exhibition in Dresden, Jury Meeting on 22.-24. August 1949," Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (hereafter SAPMO), NL 90/529, 4-6; 25.08.1949. Quoted in Saure, 351.

"were made with great tradition in mind and in a responsible manner."[286] In the newsletter of the Union of Visual Artists, as well as in the journal *bildende kunst*, the exhibition organizers stressed these goals in articles and reviews for months prior to the exhibition. Party officials scrutinized smaller regional exhibitions, as well as the all-German exhibition *Artists Work for Peace* (1952), for evidence that the GDR's art production was moving in the right direction well in advance of the national exhibition in 1953. But these pre-emptive measures had little effect. Although the *Third German Art Exhibition* was comprised of representational works exclusively, the show failed to reflect a cohesive style. Instead it created a jumbled impression which was disappointing both to the Party leadership and to many participating artists. According to the catalog, works with socialist subject matter were not lacking at the exhibition. Among the illustrated works are idyllic vignettes of daily life in the GDR, from grade school classrooms to communal farms, as well as portraits of important socialist statesmen and communist or revolutionary heroes. But to the extent that the titles listed in the register permit a conclusion, the majority of works not reproduced in the catalog were not discernibly socialist in their content. Instead, the genre scenes, landscapes, portraits, and nudes which comprised the bulk of the exhibition lacked a clear socialist underpinning.

If the works in the *Third German Art Exhibition* showed little demonstrable progress towards a socialist realist image, however, the combination of illustrations and text in the show's catalog delivered a number of clear political messages. In the catalog's introduction, Minister President Otto Grotewohl states that the overall goal for artists as well as the rest of the GDR's population is "nothing less than the creation of a new, peaceful, and progressive German national culture." Grotewohl echoes the sentiment

[286] Quoted in Halbrehder, 31.

expressed by Werner Ruhner's *Eighth of May, 1945* [see Fig. 3.1] when he suggests that a new German culture can develop only with the guidance of the Soviet Union. Like Orlow/Semyonov, Grotewohl declares that "[a]rt that does not choose as its central concern liberated labor and the productive human being, that true Prometheus of human culture, his desires and suffering, his battles and victories, that art is alienated from the world and does not deserve to exist."[287] This assertion that artists who refuse to depict socialist themes would lose the right to produce art at all represents the more radical side of the Party line.

In his catalog contribution, Helmut Holtzhauer, chair of the State Commission for Art Affairs, assesses the situation in a more positive way and provides a foil to Grotewohl's aggressive prose. Holtzhauer stresses the progress made by artists since the previous *German Art Exhibition* in 1949. "Since then, there has been a relentless struggle to theoretically and practically overcome antiquated and residual aesthetic attitudes, and the fight against formalism in art has been taken up everywhere."[288] The president of the exhibition's organizing committee, the artist Otto Nagel, uses his catalog essay to reiterate Holtzhauer's praise of artists' increasing participation in the creation of a socialist society. Nagel asserts that the exhibiting artists are entirely engaged in shaping the "progressive, societal, and cultural experiences of our times." But Nagel does not go so far as to claim that German artists have arrived at a socialist realist method of expression. Instead he declares more generally that "[t]he entire passionate participation

[287] Otto Grotewohl, introduction to *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953), n.p.
[288] Helmut Holtzhauer, untitled essay in *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953), n.p.

of the working person in the creation of a [Socialist] basis in the German Democratic Republic is reflected in the creations of our artists."[289]

Grotewohl's heavy-handed threats show that the Party leadership feared that the *Third German Art Exhibition* revealed a willful failure on the part of the GDR's artists to subscribe to the prerequisites of socialist realist representation, while Holtzhauer's blinkered and pedantic insistence on the success of the show seems to minimize those same failings, perhaps to deflect criticism of the State Arts Commission, which was ultimately responsible for the exhibition. Finally, Nagel's carefully vague but overall positive evaluation of the state of the visual arts in the GDR, while somewhat dull in its neutrality, reflects the awkward position of artists who still believed they could work towards the goals of Socialism without acquiescing to a single, prescribed method or style.[290]

The West German Contribution

If Holtzhauer's essay serves to mitigate the more strident tones of Grotewohl's view of GDR art, it also chastises the East German artist, whose situation he sees as vastly better than that of the West German artist. In the West, Holtzhauer writes, "powerful banks and industry mobilize to take away art's noble purpose, to deny art's role as a societal power…while promoting a cosmopolitanism, hostile to our people, which denies national interests and forces [artists living in West Germany] to go

[289] Otto Nagel, untitled essay in *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953), n.p.
[290] Here it is important to note that several of artists and scholars attending the exhibition complained that the experience of viewing the show was very different from the impression conveyed by the catalog; see below.

hungry."[291] Holtzhauer emphasizes the importance of "supporting those [West German] artists who do not allow themselves to be subjugated by formalism but instead fight for the preservation of national forms and direct all of their strength against American imperialism and its campaign against culture and peace."[292] These western artists, Holtzhauer stresses, can learn from advances already made by GDR artists who have combined Germany's national art-historical heritage with lessons from Soviet art, producing socialist realist work identifiable by its "truthfulness, conceptual richness [*Ideenreichtum*], and artistic mastery."[293] In these assertions, Holtzhauer introduces an underlying theme within the catalog which nearly eclipses the motifs of German-Soviet cooperation and everyday socialist life which were ostensibly the primary concerns of the show. The West German presence at the *Third German Art Exhibition* was substantial and included about a third of the works in the exhibition, a number of which were reproduced in the catalog and in the journal *bildende kunst*. Western artists were also physically present in Dresden, participating in the conference held in conjunction with the exhibition. But the catalog does not simply register this western presence; it uses works with West German subject matter to mount an explicit, hostile critique of the Federal Republic, rendering West Germany as authoritarian, anti-socialist, and even neo-fascist.

One such work which received a good deal of attention at the exhibition was Willy Colberg's *Streikposten in Hamburg* (*Picketers in Hamburg*) [Fig. 3.5]. The painting shows two dockworkers standing in front of a chained and locked wharf, their frontal positions reinforcing the horizontal boundary of the gate. In stature, facial

[291] Holtzhauer, untitled essay, n.p.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.

features, and clothing the rendering of the two men is quite similar, and this in turn helps to underline their common purpose of blocking access to the harbor. Colberg's painting likely refers to a major strike by longshoremen in Hamburg (and later in Bremen) from 22. October to 9. November 1951. The strike was not endorsed by the West German Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union, but instead was organized largely by the local Communist Party to demand an increase in wages above the raise the Union had negotiated with employers. Although workers with other political affiliations participated in the strike, the key role of the Communists in its organization meant that both state and federal politicians interpreted the strike as Communist agitation supported by the GDR; the Union warned of the involvement of "foreign powers…trying to disrupt the [West] German economy."[294] The head of Hamburg's Social Democratic Party worried that the strike was a "dress rehearsal…perhaps to be followed by a broader assault," that is, that the strike would leave the Federal Republic vulnerable to invasion from the East.[295] For Communists like Colberg, the eventual involvement of Hamburg's police would have increased the symbolic resonance of the image of striking workers, expanding it into a protest of the state's violence toward the working class.

While the viewer can easily apprehend the subject matter and story of Colberg's painting, *Picketers in Hamburg* is not a straightforward illustration. Unlike the three images of Soviet-German friendship I discussed earlier, Colberg's picture does not reveal the entire story of the dockworkers' strike, but only alludes to it. The two figures pictured in the center of the composition, are compact and completely still; although there is a

[294] This accusation was perhaps not completely unfounded; at the very least, the striking workers received moral and material support from the East Germans, including a donation of 100,000 marks; a large shipment of food was turned back at the border by West German authorities. See Gerald Sommer, "Streik im Hamburger Hafen. Arbeiterprotest, Gewerkschaften und KPD," in *Ergebnisse* 13 (April 1981).
[295] Ibid., 77.

suggestion of readiness or potential for movement in their stance, their immobility effectively evokes a certain steadfastness. Such an interpretation, however, depends on the viewer's knowledge of the 1951 strike. By relying on that knowledge, Colberg could create a more subtle and, at the same time, a more generalized representation, so that the Hamburg strike becomes symbolic of the struggle for labor rights in the west. And indeed, Colberg's painting likely enjoyed a special, coincidental resonance as it hung in Dresden. In the last week of the *Third German Art Exhibition*, around the 25th of April 1953, longshoremen in Hamburg and Bremen again went on strike, this time for six weeks.[296]

In comparison with the other West German-themed works reproduced in the exhibition's catalog, Colberg's painting is remarkably nuanced. The slight ambiguity of the picture (including a specific location but no date in the title) requires the viewer's participation in understanding the exact subject while allowing the theme to remain universal. The three works which follow *Picketers in Hamburg* in the catalog, on the other hand, are exhaustively descriptive and require little participatory thought from the viewer. All three deal with an event central to the identity of Communists in both East and West Germany in the early 1950s: the death of the worker Philipp Müller by police gunfire at a demonstration against West German rearmament in Essen in 1952.[297] After the incident in Essen, Müller became a martyr-like figure, his death used by the GDR's

[296] See the local history of the Bremerhaven Metalworkers' Trade Union (*IG Metall*), http://www2.igmetall.de/homepages/bremerhaven/dieigmetallstelltsichvor/arbeitergeschichtebremerhavens.html, n.d. (accessed 2. August 2004).

[297] The demonstration was planned by the Communist-affiliated Free German Youth (FDJ) in defiance of its ban in West Germany as of June 1951. The city of Essen refused to grant permission for the event, but 30,000 marched illegally; police reportedly shot into the crowds after being provoked with stones and firearms by the marchers. See Michael Herms and Karla Popp, *Westarbeit der FDJ, 1946-1989. Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Metropol, 1997). See also the website of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, http://www.nrw2000.de/nrw/demonstration.htm.

Free German Youth in particular to decry the violence of the West German state towards Communists and their allies.[298] Müller's symbolic status is obvious in the *Third German Art Exhibition* catalog, though neither of the paintings reproduced in the catalog depict the 1952 march in Essen. Instead, they record memorials held in honor of the young Communist in the Federal Republic.

In the West German painter Hanns Kralik's *Philipp-Müller-Aufgebot* (*Mobilization for Philipp Müller*) [Fig. 3.6], an enormous portrait of Müller forms a focal point at the back of a crowded composition peopled by stiff, schematically rendered bodies organized into groups of two or three. In the foreground a small group of demonstrators is shown clustered around a table to sign what is perhaps intended by the artist to represent the petition against West German anti-rearmament, the same cause for which Müller lost his life.[299] Like Kralik's painting, Werner Laux' *Dem Patrioten Philipp Müller* (*To the Patriot Philipp Müller*) [Fig. 3.7] emphasizes the memorialization of Müller rather than the circumstances of his death, underscoring this with the inclusion of the iconic, oversized portrait of Müller visible on the left. Where Kralik shows German youth responding to Müller's tragic death with positive action, Laux depicts a more somber scene, the funeral procession itself. Here a wreath is laid by two men while a lone woman, probably a portrait of Müller's widow, stands rigidly at the front of the crowd. The funereal atmosphere necessitates a more orderly composition, but the artist's depiction of the participants is similar in style to Kralik's; Laux renders bodies and faces in a consistent, smooth, and almost undifferentiated way. In his painting, Laux heightens

[298] The FDJ named one of its highest youth awards for Philipp Müller.
[299] Kralik was a West German Communist, a cultural advisor in the city of Düsseldorf, and a member of the jury of the *Third German Art Exhibition*. Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR SAPMO-Barch, NY 4535.

the drama of the already somber occasion by including two West German police officers with their batons drawn standing to the side of the procession on the lower left; a third officer stands against a crowd of bystanders who gesture accusingly, either towards the funeral or towards the police. With these two paintings, one by an East German and one by a West German, the catalog communicates the symbolic importance of Philipp Müller in both East and West Germany and in effect demonstrates the solidarity between East and West German socialists brought about by Müller's death.

Colberg's *Picketers* [see Fig. 3.5] and Kralik and Laux's Philipp Müller pictures offer three interpretations of the contemporary West German political situation, each suggesting the danger of state violence to varying degrees. While Colberg does not depict a police presence at the strike site in *Picketers in Hamburg*, the confrontational stance of his main figures implies their readiness for that eventuality, and an informed viewer would know already about the police response to the 1951 strike. Similarly, while no police are visible in Kralik's *Mobilization for Philipp Müller*, the artist is expressly concerned with the consequences of police violence against socialists and Communists in the Federal Republic. Finally, Laux's *To the Patriot Philipp Müller* suggests impending police intervention by the nervous stance in which the artist renders the two officers on the left and by the crowd he sets against the third officer on the right. Although Laux's stiff, static figures do not convey this effectively, his goal appears to have been to evoke a feeling of tension and inevitable conflict.

The catalog's final critical representation of the Federal Republic takes this progressive escalation to its logical conclusion by actually depicting a recent incident of police violence in West Berlin. Gernot Battesch's *Der 15. August 1951 in West-Berlin*

(*The 15th of August 1951 in West Berlin*) [Fig. 3.8] shows a group of marching FDJ members being attacked from the side by two West German police officers. The painting refers to an episode which occurred during the 1951 World Youth Festival, when the government of West Berlin launched a campaign to draw the thousands of East German youth visiting East Berlin for the festival into the west.[300] In defiance of the ban recently leveled against its West German counterpart, the GDR's Free German Youth responded, and nearly ten thousand of its members marched into the western sector on August 15. West Berlin police considered this a provocation by an illegal group and attacked the demonstrators.[301] Battesch's painting rounds out the catalog's characterization of the repressive nature of the Federal Republic by representing the West German state's hostility towards East Germans. These images contrast sharply with the positive images of Soviet stewardship which accompanied them in the catalog, and they portray the Federal Republic as violent, reactionary, and consistently undermining the progressive goals of the GDR.

The West German Reception

The four works I have discussed here demonstrate that the catalog of the *Third German Art Exhibition* was organized to produce a distinctly anti-West-German message. And while it is difficult to determine whether or not the catalog, and by extension the exhibition, were perceived by western viewers as hostile towards the government of the Federal Republic, the show did receive close attention in West Germany. The exhibition

[300] These were the same young East Germans who apparently attended the 1951 exhibition of the Deutscher Künstlerbund in significant numbers. See Chapter One.
[301] Those who did visit the western sector were greeted with magazines, cigarettes, and other premiums, and several thousand applied for political asylum (though fewer than 100 of those applications were accepted). Michael Herms, "Stalin, Folklore und ein Marsch auf West-Berlin." *Berliner Zeitung* 20.07.1996.

was newsworthy in the West in part because of its status as a major national event in the GDR and because it was a descendent of the first important review of modern art, the 1946 *General German Art Exhibition* in Dresden. But the participation of West Germans in 1953 no doubt also attracted the attention of the West German government and press. Much of the western response to the 1953 exhibition is dismissive. In a review in the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, the author addresses only briefly the participation of West Germans in the exhibition, diminishing the "all-German" character of the show. The reporter quotes liberally from jargon-filled reviews published in GDR newspapers, but the overall tone is less alarmist than it is trivializing. "One sees many fists, many determined worker's faces. One sees workers discussing at a construction site, workers conferring at a lathe, workers chatting at the cement mixer. It's only workers toiling which one hardly sees."[302] The *Spiegel* reviewer goes still further, suggesting that the tired subjects seen in these paintings were not well-received by the East German public, which was no longer willing to accept such representations as "reality." This statement hints that the art on display in Dresden is not in fact German at all, but an artificial cultural product forced onto its audience by the Soviet-allied SED.

But if the *Spiegel's* review diminished the importance of the *Third German Art Exhibition*, the West German Federal Ministry for All-German Matters considered the show important enough to merit closer consideration and published a 45-page pamphlet, entitled "Polit-Art in the Soviet-Occupied Zone," which took a more critical view than

[302] "Revolutionäre Romantik," *Der Spiegel* 25. March 1953, 27. The author mentions a few West German participants and names two west German members of the jury. A few years earlier, in 1949, signing an East German petition was enough to force Heinrich Ehmsen, a senior professor at Berlin's School of the Arts, out of his job; the same campaign very nearly cost Karl Hofer his position, as well. Thus the *Spiegel's* mention of specific artists' names, if not a denunciation in itself, would have drawn negative attention to the artist. See Christine Fischer-Defoy, *Ich habe das Meine gesagt! Reden und Stellungnahmen von Karl Hofer zu Kunst, Kultur und Politik in Deutschland 1945 –1955* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1995), 133.

the *Spiegel*. The title is a play on Soviet terminology (cf. *Politburo*) and is typical of contemporary West German vocabulary, which continued to refer to the East as an occupied Zone long after the two German states were founded.[303] This slim booklet includes an essay describing the exhibition itself, as well as many full-page images which its author took straight from the 1953 exhibition catalog. The essay and illustrations are followed by a survey of eastern newspaper essays and reviews of the Dresden show. The author, Christian Wulffen, claims that the "German Bolsheviks" are responsible for "abuse and corruption of art which vastly exceeds anything previously seen in Europe."[304] Like the *Spiegel* reviewer, Wulffen claims that in spite of "the adulation which is naturally always in the foreground," the reviews which he reprints reveal "a degree of distance and criticism to the careful reader," proof of the skepticism of the GDR public towards the state-sanctioned art on display in Dresden.

In spite of the combined anti-Western slant effected by the essays and first several images in the *Third German Art Exhibition's* catalog, the "Polit-Art" booklet focuses on what the author sees as the archaic style and poor quality of the works it reproduces. He ignores the catalog's animosity towards the Federal Republic and its explicit representations, in particular, of West German attitudes towards socialists and Communists on its soil. Instead, Wulffen characterizes the East Germans responsible for the exhibition as hapless lackeys of the Soviets. The more powerful rhetorical thrust of the pamphlet as a whole is a criticism of (and perhaps a warning to) the West Germans

[303] This was due in part to the fact that the two German governments did not recognize one another as legitimate states until 1973, but the term "Ostzone" also carries a connotation that the GDR wasn't a German state so much as a puppet of the Soviet Union.
[304] Less than 10 years after National Socialism, this is a remarkable claim to make. Christian Wulffen, "Polit-Kunst in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone" (Bonn: Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen, 1953), 7.

who participated in the Dresden exhibition, whom Wulffen describes as providing a screen for the real purpose of the show:

> Drawn across the sorry efforts of political poster painting is a veil of works which are, shall we say, neutral. Neutral politically as well as within the framework of the development of art. Intellectually, they are derived from the middle of the previous century. If one looks in the catalog to see where these thing come from, one sees [various West German towns]…No fewer than 117 "guests from West Germany." They sent landscapes, portraits, still lifes, et cetera. They and their work serve to mitigate the brutality of the "Art Leadership."[305]

Wulffen's assertions are supported in a dramatic way by a report, allegedly written by an eastern artist, detailing the unjust jurying practices of the show and the larger problems within the GDR art world in general.[306] This apparent eyewitness account is surpassed, however, by a long essay which Wulffen claims was taken from the guestbook of the exhibition. This essay, allegedly written by a group of East German artists in opposition to the Soviet-influenced art politics of the SED, goes beyond a description of the status of the artist in the East. Like Wulffen's own summary, it concentrates instead on the detrimental effects of the participation of West German artists in the Dresden show.

> All these West German artists should undertake a personal inspection [of the Dresden show] in order to be convinced of how much they have compromised and betrayed both themselves and art by submitting their work…They would come to the painful realization that their pictures are only displayed in Dresden because they are West Germans. As propaganda they are used as needed and then discarded by a system as hostile towards their work as it is towards the Soviet-Zone artists who dare to paint differently than Soviet propaganda guidelines dictate.[307]

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[305] Ibid.

[306] The archival evidence bears this accusation out. At the August meeting of the executive board of the Berlin Union of Visual Artists, board members accused Helmut Holtzhauer, the head of the State Commission for Art Matters and the FDJ's Erich Honnecker of removing paintings from the *Third Art Exhibition* the night before it opened. Only after the debacle of the 1953 show and the process of de-Stalinization did the Party leadership admit these unscrupulous practices, which were fairly common. See *Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler*. Verein bildender Künstler Deutschlands, ed. (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953), 78.

[307] Wulffen, 42.

PROBLEMS OF EAST-WEST COLLABORATION

Just as these anonymous authors recognized the all-German aspect of the Dresden show as a legitimate threat, for the East German organizers the participation of West Germans was an important accomplishment. The presence of West Germans helped sustain the ideal of an all-German, socialist culture which was a crucial part of the SED's ideology. But far from the enthusiastic western participation alleged by the dissenting artists in Wulffen's booklet, most of the West German artists who were invited to exhibit in Dresden had to be convinced to participate.[308] Many were very worried about the conditions under which they would be accepted. In extensive reports to the East German Ministry of Culture, the members of the Union of Visual Artists who conducted studio visits in the Federal Republic cited artists' worries of political repercussions at home and accompanying financial fallout.[309] Others feared they would be asked to submit work, only to have that work deemed inappropriate because of stylistic concerns and rejected by the jury once it arrived in Dresden.[310]

In their studio visits, the Union members did their best to allay these fears, surprising western artists by considering "the occasional nude," rather than only politically-themed work.[311] But the visiting East Germans were concerned about the

[308] The selection of western works for the 1946 exhibition had been much different. The painter Hans Grundig and the art historian Will Grohman spent three short weeks in the western zones, picking up works from "every artist of value" in two trucks on loan from Saxony's local government; western artists appear to have been more enthusiastic about loaning their work then, in spite of the role of the Soviet occupational government. See Hans Grundig, letter to Lea Grundig, reprinted in *Hans Grundig. Künstlerbriefe aus den Jahren 1926 bis 1957* (Rudolstadt: 1966). Quoted in Halbrehder, 29.

[309] At least two of the regional reports record these sentiments. Tom Beyer, Report on Studio Visits in West Germany, (Stiftungsarchiv Akademie der Künste, hereafter SAdK), VBK-Archiv, Dresdner Ausstellungen 29/1, 147; Willy Wolff and Franz Nolde, Report on Studio Visits in West Germany, SAdK, VBK-Archiv, Dresdner Ausstellungen 29/1,155.

[310] Heinz Mansfeld, Report on studio visits in West Germany. SAdK, VBK-Archiv, Dresdner Ausstellungen 29/2, 172.

[311] Willy Wolff and Franz Nolde, Report on Studio Visits in West Germany, 154.

motives of the West German participants and their true political affiliations, and at least one committee member was concerned about the possible inclusion of artists who had been successful during National Socialism.[312] Most striking in the search committee's reviews is the members' concern with the relative level of ability of the western artists. Again and again they admit their overall disappointment with the quality of work they saw; one artist suggested in his evaluation of the process that the western artists had been chosen less for their ability than for their connections within the leftist scene:

> "We are still unsure of where [the West German organizer] obtained his addresses. It was obvious that he had not sought out qualitatively good artists from at least somewhat qualified circles…With a few exceptions, this weakness was true for both artistic and ideological qualifications. In particular this question of ideological standpoints should command serious attention, because the contact people were of the weakest ability and simultaneously among the most opportunistic elements."[313]

The problems encountered by the visiting Union members in the preparatory stages of the 1953 exhibition grew into a larger problem once the show opened. Contrary to the assertions of the "Polit-Art" booklet, which takes Grotewohl's and Holtzhauer's declarations of success for granted, many of the East German artists responsible for planning the exhibition in Dresden were disappointed with the results. Their criticism of the show and catalog came to light at the German Artists' Conference held towards the end of the exhibition's run in late April 1953. In evidence of the common sensibilities of Germans on both sides of the border, the catalog, which both Wulffen and the *Spiegel* article rely on so heavily, bore the brunt of the GDR artists' displeasure.

The catalog was the primary means of carrying the message of the exhibition beyond Dresden, but as Wulffen and the *Spiegel* indicate, that message was less than

[312] Heinz Mansfeld, Report on studio visits in West Germany, 172.
[313] Report on studio visits to Bavaria. SAdK, VBK-Archiv, Dresdner Ausstellungen 29/1, 136.

flattering to the participants. The painter Tom Beyer, head of the state Union of Visual Artists of Mecklenburg-Pomerania, went so far as to suggest that the catalog's design was so poor that it "helped the enemy," providing West German critics of socialist realism with plenty of ammunition.[314] Given the importance of the catalog in shaping the coverage of the show in *Spiegel* and "Polit-Art," Beyer was probably right. In a letter to the conference participants, the Cologne-based art historian Hans F. Secker commented on the resonance of the catalog in the West:

> Since Bonn will not allow me to visit the Dresden exhibition, I am dependent on publications which coincidentally make it this far, primarily the official illustrated catalog. A catalog is something permanent and goes out into the wide world—and the publishers have to take that into consideration. But in the publication at hand the selection of illustrations is disappointing, it is one-sided and composed from a purely ideological angle [and it] presents works from East and West which are truly not the best. That is regrettable, because a lack of artistic quality does not promote [our cause], but rather detracts from it. And in this case it also hampers the serious and arduous work of the progressive intellectuals of the West towards mutual understanding between Germany's two parts.[315]

Here Secker ties the inferior technique applied in the majority of works shown in the catalog to their overwhelmingly ideological slant, blaming both for the publication's negative affect. Secker's worries that the low-quality catalog might hurt the reputation of the GDR exhibition were seconded by a West German member of the conference's steering committee:

> I said at the time that this catalog is a very dangerous instrument for us. We won't be able to use it over there [in the West]. And that's just what happened. I said, the exhibition in Dresden is not the same as the catalog, the exhibition looks different. But theoretically I couldn't explain this [further]…because the exhibition catalog is the mirror of the show for those people who can't come.[316]

[314] *Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler*, 22.
[315] Ibid., 72
[316] Ibid., 75.

Both East and West German artists and scholars worried that the catalog of the *Third German Art Exhibition* would misrepresent their efforts in the Federal Republic. But if the catalog was a major stumbling block, the show itself was similarly problematic. Not only did the Party see no evidence of German socialist realism in Dresden, sympathetic West German visitors and the East German organizing artists also found the show troubling. Trying to pinpoint what had gone wrong, Bernhard Kretzschmar, a respected Dresden painter and printmaker, described a certain dull consistency among the works exhibited, as if the works did not capture the artists' critical engagement with the conceptual underpinnings of their subjects. For Kretzschmar, it was this "lack of any conflict which somehow bore[d] our western friends…Where there is no conflict, the dream is over."[317] In addition to the scant variation between subjects and formal approaches in the exhibition, the show's critics noted an even more detrimental overall effect, what one eastern artist called a "discrepancy between progressive subject matter on the one hand and a nearly unbelievably low level of composition on the other."[318] According to the majority of critiques of *Third German Art Exhibition*, that imbalance between content and form was the defining feature of the show. In all, these evaluations of the exhibition draw largely negative conclusions, reflecting a thorough disappointment among artists and scholars and a considerable cleft between the art community and the politicians of the SED. The reality was a far cry from the triumphant, Soviet-directed art apparatus, in which artists and Party were closely united, described by the *Spiegel* and "Polit-Art." Instead, the 1953 show revealed exactly how fragmented visual arts production in the GDR was at the time.

[317] Ibid., 82. *Konfliktlosigkeit* is also a reference to a tenet of Soviet realism introduced in 1946. Conflictlessness prohibited the depiction in art of conflict within Soviet Society (See Bown, 228).
[318] *Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler*, 90.

Socialist Realism: Form and Content in Conflict

By 1953 the demonstrative method employed by Dymschitz and Orlow, in which the author described the preferred characteristics of socialist realism through a litany of negative examples, was well-established in the rhetoric of GDR art criticism. The reception and analysis of the *Third German Art Exhibition* is dominated by this type of criticism. In spite of the increasingly antagonistic attempts by politicians and Party-loyal artists and scholars to shift artistic production towards the Soviet definition of socialist realism, the 1953 exhibition revealed a continuing discrepancy between what the Party wanted and what artists were actually producing. This discrepancy was thrown into high relief by the all-German structure of the show, which allowed the differences between East and West German interpretations of socialist realism to appear particularly striking; the resulting contrast made the public discussions of the exhibition all the more complicated. Because the official definition of socialist realism required artists to look to everyday life for their subjects, for example, the West German Willy Colberg's *Picketers in Hamburg* [see Fig. 3.5] would be inappropriate for a viewer in East Germany, where strikes did not occur.[319] But the participants at the German Artists' Conference considered works like Colberg's to be an acceptable type of representation for the Federal Republic, where the struggle for socialism was still ongoing; Colberg's determined longshoremen might be an inspiration to the West German viewer.[320]

[319] A few months after the exhibition closed, East Germany was in fact rocked by massive strikes, but the discussion in Dresden demonstrates just how far outside the realm of possibility the government considered strikes to be.

[320] As I discuss below, some participants sought to make similar allowances for the form of West German representations, asserting that it was the very artists who were still tempted by "formalism," and who were largely eliminated by the jury, who were the Federal Republic's most politically progressive.

Heinz Mansfeld, the director of the state museum in Schwerin, felt that *Picketers in Hamburg* was exemplary in its approach to the content and form of socialist realism. In his introductory address at the German Artists' Conference, Mansfeld uses Colberg's painting to illustrate the three most important principles of socialist realism, which he identifies as subject matter, the idea of the typical, and form. For Mansfeld, *Picketers in Hamburg* is successful because of the artist's ability to depict the typical, the most elusive of those three necessary principles. Mansfeld anchors his analysis of Colberg's work in an authoritative source, invoking the Soviet Premier Gyorgii Malenkov, who had defined the typical at the 19th Party Congress of the CPSU in 1952 as "not only what is encountered most frequently, but that which most fully and vividly expresses the essence of the given social force."[321] In Mansfeld's estimation, the typical is captured in Colberg's painting in particular in the faces, bearing (which reveal what Mansfeld calls *Arbeitsruhe*, the suspension of labor), and hands of the dockworkers.[322] The strike band on one figure's arm, the emptiness of the harbor behind the gate, and the shipping traffic that has been rendered immobile through the strike all suggest to Mansfeld a

[321] SAdK, VBK-Archiv, Dresdner Ausstellungen 19, 13. Malenkov's original quote: "In their creation of artistic images, our artists, writers and workers in the arts must constantly remember that the typical is not only what is encountered most frequently, but that which most fully and vividly expresses the essence of the given social force. In the Marxist-Leninist interpretation, the typical does not (at) all mean some statistical average. The typical should correspond to the essence of the given socio-historical phenomenon; it is not just the widespread, the frequently repeated, or the commonplace. Deliberate exaggeration which gives sharpness to an image does not make the image atypical but shows and stresses the typical more fully." Transcript in *Pravda*(6 October 1952), reprinted in *Current Digest of Soviet Press*, Vol. 4, No. 39 (8 November 1952), p. 45.

[322] Colberg was among the artists living in the Federal Republic whom Mansfeld visited in preparation for the 1953 exhibition. Although he was a West German, Colberg had more exposure to East German methods and doctrine than most of his western colleagues, having participated in the exhibition *Artists Work For Peace* in 1952, and he had been working in an East German collective for some months before the 1953 show. See Eckhart Gillen, *"Schwierigkeiten beim Suchen der Wahrheit." Bernhard Heisig im Konflikt zwischen 'verordnetem Antifaschismus' und der Auseinandersetzung mit seinem Kriegstrauma* (Ph.D. Diss., Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2002), 158fn. Colberg's exemplary status is demonstrated by his appointment to the jury of the *Third German Art Exhibition*. See *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953).

characteristically rendered strike scene, but it is the attitude of the striking workers themselves which most convinces him of the artist's accomplishment: "Their stance is steady, because in this [painting] it is not only determined through drawing and composition, but also through the enduring and pugnacious attitude which the figures of the two workers exude. One senses it: no one will be allowed to pass!"[323]

By elaborating on a West German example, Mansfeld uses his conference speech to draw attention not only to the artist's successful method, but also to the all-German character of the *Third German Art Exhibition*. Mansfeld states that Colberg, "who lives under the conditions of resurgent imperialism," is right to choose the strike as his motif, even though the subject would be inappropriate for an East German artist. He describes other subjects available to the artists of the GDR, including the increased productivity of the worker, worker education, and the advances made by the State in various areas of civic life. To illustrate the difference between West German and East German socialist realist representation, Mansfeld compares Colberg's *Picketers* to Erich Hering's painting *Nationalpreisträger Erich Wirth mit seinem Kollektiv* (*National Prize Winner Erich Wirth with his Collective*) [Fig. 3.9]. Hering's painting is essentially a group portrait, a subject far from the tension of potential heroic action evoked by Colberg's image of alert longshoremen, but the comparison is an evocative one because of a few crucial similarities between the two works. Because Hering's painting is a quiet composition with little movement, the subjects' mental focus is the dominant feature, much as it is in Colberg's *Picketers*. In addition, Hering's rendering of the open half-circle of figures treats the body of the worker with the same kind of attention that Colberg does, giving his figures slightly oversized hands, for example, as if to call attention to the specific

[323] Heinz Mansfeld, "Zur 3. deutschen Kunstausstellung," *bildende kunst* 3/1953, 22-23.

gestures of each man. Wirth, in the white lab coat in the upper right, motions with his left hand as if clarifying a fine point of the schematic drawing he holds in his right. The other engineer holds his chin in his left hand in a classic pose of absorbed attention, while two technicians in traditional blue smocks hold and install the machine's components. The hands of the technicians here are crucial to communicating the specific role as well as the mental state of each figure in the composition in a way that their impassive faces do not. Hering makes use of a trope common in early twentieth-century art across a broad spectrum, from Van Gogh to Kirchner, through which the artist exaggerates certain physical features of the subject for the sake of narrative emphasis or symbolic weight.

But when Mansfeld analyzes Hering's painting, he looks for evidence that the artist did not stray from the model of nature. He finds, for example, that the drawing which underlies Hering's depiction of the machine was "not carefully thought through."[324] Presumably careful viewing would reveal incompatibilities between the machine's parts, or areas in which the artist elided the details, demonstrating a lack of research into his subject. Still, Mansfeld relents when it comes to the primary focus of Hering's picture, the National Prize Winner himself. Although Mansfeld concludes that the viewer is not immediately able to identify Wirth in the painting (a failing of the composition), Mansfeld states that the artist "is able to reproduce, characteristically and typically, the innovator as a type, one who, through the power of his own thought…is mentally inspired to further develop the mechanical processes of manufacturing."[325] By extension, then, the reason that the accurate rendering of the machine is so crucial is that without accuracy in the mechanical details Wirth's engineering innovations have no

[324] Ibid., 24.
[325] Ibid.

validation within the picture. But where the interpretation I offer above sees the artist's evocative portrayal of Wirth and his colleagues is necessarily tied to the figures' hands, Mansfeld reads Hering's expressive rendering as a "failure of proportion."[326] Mansfeld implicitly opposes the modernist stylistic heritage within which the artist is able to render the parts of the body expressively as a means of emphasis. Instead, in applying the prevailing definition of socialist realism as it had been repeatedly delineated by Dymschitz and Orlow/Semyonov, in terms of the painting's form Mansfeld values only the artist's naturalistic accuracy.[327]

Although Mansfeld's analysis represented what was, at the time, the dominant understanding of socialist realist representation among many Party members, a number of the artists attending the German Artists' Conference in Dresden protested the type of categorical definitions that Mansfeld and others applied to such artworks. In particular, Mansfeld's use of Colberg's *Picketers in Hamburg* as a largely successful example of socialist realism brought forth protests from Colberg's fellow artists. Somewhat remarkably, in his response to Mansfeld's presentation the painter Ernst Hassebrauk turns the major thesis of the formalism debate on its head. Hassebrauk argues that *Picketers in Hamburg* "reveals formalism in an ideological way," and he uses the painting to demonstrate that formalism was not limited to subjects antithetical to the socialist cause. Where Mansfeld praises Colberg's depiction of the typical, Hassebrauk counters that

[326] Ibid.

[327] Mansfeld's critique recalls the discussions which took place at *Iron and Steel* the year before. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, the kind of naturalistic accuracy Mansfeld advocates was found in the more conservative representational works chosen by West German industrialists to represent their corporations. In spite of this overlap, the East German reception of *Iron and Steel* was quite negative, especially with regard to those naturalistic pictures. One East German reviewer noted that "[a]bout half of the works were distinguished by a derivative naturalistic representation which made use of a dumb, superficial schematic approach." See hk, "Der entlarvte Mäcenas. Kritische Bermerkungen zu der Düsseldorfer Ausstellung 'Eisen und Stahl." in *Der Bildende Künstler* vol 3 nr. 5 May/June 1952: 9-10.

Colberg's painting lacked significant content and thus worked against any expression of the vital aspects of socialist life. Hassebrauk maintains that a disjunction between form and content is not necessarily limited to abstract art, but that it simply "doesn't take much to use abstract paintings to define formalism." For Hassebrauk, in spite of Colberg's figurative style the painting is an empty illustration, one which "might have constituted a very good commercial poster at the turn of the century" but which was "a type of derivatively academic advertisement" inappropriate for a national art exhibition.[328] Hassebrauk's critique of *Picketers in Hamburg*, in particular his appropriation of the term formalism, lays bear the weak points of Colberg's painting but also reveals the pitfalls of the SED's current formulation of the formalism-socialist realism dichotomy, drawing attention to its conceptual inconsistencies.[329]

The discrepancies between form and content in Dresden reached a good deal deeper than the Colberg example, however. This was due to an apparently widespread confusion—or a conscious blurring—between naturalism and realism which stemmed in part from National Socialism's still recent promotion of naturalistic representation. In its review of the *Third German Art Exhibition*, the journal *bildende kunst* published a full-page, full-color reproduction of Gerhard Müller's painting *Bildnis eines Offiziers der Volkspolizei* (*Portrait of an Officer of the Garrisoned People's Police*) [Fig. 3.10], a three-quarter length portrait of a young man in uniform. Set against a mottled deep red background, the figure turns to gaze out of the picture, his brow slightly creased. The figure's left hand grasps the strap of the holster in a gesture that suggests casual alertness,

[328] SAdK, VBK-Archiv, Dresdner Ausstellungen 19, 92.
[329] At an executive board meeting of the Union of Visual Artists later that year, the crisis in defining formalism was still acute. In a letter read to the board, a group of artists based in Weimar declared in its "Weimar Resolution" that "[t]he word 'formalism' should be refuted, both scientifically and artistically," because it contained "no clear definition of the term."*Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler*, 30.

as does the angle of the cap on his head. The right hand of the figure holds a thick red book, and a smaller notebook and a few papers lie on the edge of a table in the picture's lower right. While the uniform depicted here is somewhat plain, the large, shiny crest on the officer's cap identifies it as belonging to a member of the new East German security force.

It is indicative of the painting's positive reception among certain visitors to the Dresden show that Müller's work received privileged treatment in *bildende kunst*, the premier arts publication in the GDR. The painting seemed to address all of the demands made by the SED and its Soviet counselors, which were the same characteristics enumerated by Heinz Mansfeld at the German Artists' Conference: naturalistic form, subject matter relevant to the German socialist state, and the representation of the typical. In portraying the police officer, Müller avoids any formal experimentation in favor of a restrained, naturalistic approach similar to the approach used in most conventional western portraiture of the twentieth century. A prominent visiting Soviet artist, Wassilij Jefanov, praised Müller's willingness to address a "new subject," in this case the GDR's proto-military volunteer police force, a theme perfectly in keeping with Party guidelines.[330] Jefanov also commended Müller's placement of the officer's cap, as well as his stance, both of which Jefanov construed as "typical." The preferential treatment of Müller's painting in *bildende kunst* suggests that the artist's method was quite successful; indeed, Jefanov asserted that, if not for the somewhat leaden quality of the rendering and

[330] Due to international restrictions on Germany's ability to raise an army, the GDR introduced the "Volkspolizei," or People's Police, in the late 1940s as a domestic security force. It was built up beginning in 1952, becoming more of a national military, and eventually became the basis for the National People's Army in 1956. See http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/DasGeteilteDeutschland/JahreDesAufbausInOstUnd West/Wiederbewaffnung/kasernierteVolkspolizei.html, n.d. (accessed 21. July 2004).

the fact that the figure lacked "the burning eyes of youth," the painting could be a masterpiece of German socialist realism.[331]

Not only did the cultural guidelines of the SED and its Soviet advisors specify that the GDR's artists focus on everyday socialist reality, they also stressed that, while East German artists should consider Soviet artists to be authoritative models, German socialist realism would have to be tied to Germany's cultural legacy. Just as East and West German representation would vary due to the different political and social realities in the two states, the Party maintained that a direct transfer of Soviet motifs and formal approach was impossible because of the different national and cultural contexts of the two countries. Where the work of Repin influenced Soviet artmaking, German models from Dürer to Menzel would shape East German socialist realism, making it necessarily distinct from its Soviet relative. As a successful Soviet artist, Jefanov offered an interpretation of Müller's *Member of the Garrisoned People's Police* based on years of socialist realist practice in the USSR, but his awareness of the contemporary German context was limited, reflecting the reciprocal complications of a nationally specific socialist realism. Less than a decade after the end of the war, East German artists' search for models from previous epochs of German art inevitably evoked not the Renaissance or nineteenth-century realist heritage, but more recent, National Socialist art. In its overall style, Müller's *Member of the Garrisoned People's Police* was strikingly familiar to the German artists present at the Artists' Conference. It was an undeniable relic of the naturalist style which dominated German art in the Nazi period.

This stylistic and compositional resonance was felt so strongly by the artist-members present at the August executive board meeting that the sculptor Fritz Cremer

[331] *Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler*, 121.

took issue with Jefanov's praise of Müller's work, raising what might otherwise have been a taboo issue in an antifascist state, the persistence of Nazi naturalism and its formal relationship to contemporary realist-type representation.[332] In response to Jefanov's commentary, Cremer asserts that it is "no simple thing to distinguish between what was supposedly 'realism' in Nazi Germany and what realism actually is…" To drive home this point, he links the current formalism discussion to the stylistic confusion plaguing socialist realism, explaining that "it's a fact that many West German artists who paint in an abstract manner are progressive people. [But in] West Germany it happens to be the so-called realists who are the old Nazis, and they are the ones who…'do' realism for Adenauer, so to speak."[333] Perhaps because of his awareness of the continuity of naturalist representation in West Germany, Cremer had a very different impression of Müller's painting than did Jefanov, and he made this clear to the Soviet expert:

> Cremer: …it is almost dangerous to say what our colleague Jefanov said, that one should bow [in deference to] the painter of the "Police Officer" in Dresden. I see a political danger there.
> Jefanov: In what way do you see a danger?
> Cremer: Because to us, first and foremost, that is Nazi painting.
> Jefanov: I can't see that.
> Cremer: That's just it, to Soviet artists it's invisible; but for us, it's visible.

The East German artist Herbert Sandberg elaborated on Cremer's reservations. "While we may want…to see a police officer realistically painted, we don't want to see him in an attitude that is only differentiated from that of a Nazi officer through the book that he holds in his hand."[334] The art historian Walter Besenbruch suggested a further

[332] The East German constitution specified that the state was antifascist; with this stipulation, the Party considered the legacy of German fascism largely reconciled. See Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13-39.
[333] *Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler*, 138-140.
[334] Ibid., 140.

clarification by specifying that while the color of the book in the officer's hand had been changed by the artist to suit the socialist subject matter, the position of the raised right hand (sic) was identical to poses used to depict the typical SA or SS leader. "In my opinion, a trait like this in this kind of picture implicitly recalls that ugly aspect of the past."[335]

CONCLUSIONS

At the German Artists' Conference in Dresden earlier that year, Helmut Holtzhauer, the head of the State Art Commission, had tried to pin down the meaning of the term formalism, stressing that its central characteristic was "that it is lacking in ideas."[336] No doubt building on this particular aspect of the Commissioner's definition, and using it against him, both Sandberg and Cremer take Hassebrauk's insistence on the possibility of non-abstract formalism further. They identify the lack of ideas, or worse, "incorrect," that is, reactionary, ideas underlying works like Müller's as the main reason that such paintings are so strongly reminiscent of National Socialist art. In their contributions to the executive board meeting, critical artists like Cremer and Sandberg maintain that Nazi art was false and superficial, existing without a conceptual framework and simply serving the fascistic ideas of the regime. By implication, their criticism of Müller's painting suggests that this attitude towards art did not die with National Socialism, but endured in the minds of some contemporary Germans. Sandberg blames the deficiency in new, socialist ideas on a failed educational system, "which has not been able to fill people with the spirit which they are trying to express. This is why [this type

[335] Ibid., 144.
[336] SAdK, VBK-Archiv, *Deutschen Künstlerkongreß* (Dresdner Kunstausstellung 19), 29.-30.

of painting] is true naturalism, or if you prefer, formalism, and that is why it borders on the old 'Nazi art,' which worked with similar means."[337]

By equating naturalism and formalism, Sandberg links nominally socialist realist artworks like Müller's portrait of the police officer and the fascist propagandistic naturalism made by National Socialist artists. This was no small accusation, considering that it in effect accused Party loyalists like Mansfeld and Holtzhauer, as well as the high-profile Soviet guests at the executive board meeting, of ignoring what were at the very least structural similarities between the cultural politics of the Nazis and that of the SED.[338] While the Party line held that the German Democratic Republic was an anti-fascist state from which all remnants of Nazism had been expunged, Cremer and Sandberg called attention to the persistence in the artistic practice of the GDR of stylistic habits learned under National Socialism. The East German artists who were held accountable for enacting the Party's plans for socialist realist art faced the dual challenge of working through figurative art's associations with Nazi representation and adapting the Soviet method to a specific German context.

[337] *Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler*, 140.
[338] At the artists' congress in Dresden in April, Heinz Mansfeld declared the goals of the third Dresden exhibition to be "a return to realistic national traditions of artmaking, and a turning away from formalist, cosmopolitan degeneracy." Given the currency of this vocabulary, it is not surprising that artists like Sandberg were sensitive to other stylistic and conceptual similarities between the campaign for socialist realism and Nazi art politics.

Chapter Four: Conflicting Realities. Art at the Close of the 1950s

I have sought in the previous chapters to clarify the situation of the visual arts, especially painting, in East and West Germany in the first half of the 1950s, and the ways in which art history and criticism helped create cultural identity in the two Germanies. In what follows, I extend my investigation to the last years of that decade. As I have done in the first three chapters, I again use large-scale, publicly prominent exhibitions as anchors in my consideration of the larger German cultural-political situation: *II. documenta '59. Kunst nach 1945* (*II. documenta '59. Art After 1945*, hereafter *documenta II*) held in Kassel in 1958 and the *Vierte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (*Fourth German Art Exhibition*), held in Dresden in 1958-59.[339] There is a gap of five years between *documenta II* and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* and the shows that preceded them, but an investigation of these later exhibitions is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of how public ideas about contemporary art changed over the course of the 1950s. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which those earlier debates matured or changed, and determine where they stood just before the Berlin Wall divided Germany in 1961.

It is important to note here that my discussions of these two exhibitions do not constitute attempts at reconstruction or re-enactment. The arguments I present are not predicated on comprehensive accounts of the exhibitions, although I do offer some description of physical layout and content where it is possible based on archival evidence, and where it is germane to the discussion. Similarly, the visual material can be sparse, and I have found it necessary at times to work from small images, from black and white

[339] *documenta II* was held from 11. July to 11. October 1959, and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* ran from 28. September 1958 to 25. January 1959.

reproductions, and occasionally without any visual evidence. In these cases, the testament of contemporary viewers becomes extremely important. Rather than pure analysis of the exhibitions as independent phenomena, my emphasis is instead on defining these two exhibitions as components of larger art-historical and art-critical debates by considering the organizers' stated goals and the shows' public receptions. *documenta II* and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* were not the only art exhibitions staged in Germany in 1958 and 1959, but they present themselves for study in this context because both were major events. Their organizers made claims to be comprehensive and representative at either an international level, as at *documenta II*, or on a national level, as at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*.

In addition to the two shows, I discuss two important public conferences concerned with contemporary art production in the two Germanies, both of which emerged as responses to the disputes raised by *documenta II* and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*, respectively. "Is Modern Art Being 'Managed'?" was held in Baden-Baden in October 1959 and brought together a broad spectrum of prominent West German art and cultural critics. Two months later, in December 1959, the Union of Visual Artists of the GDR held its fourth congress in Dresden. Both of these conferences ostensibly were organized in order to provide a sounding board for current concerns of artists and critics, but in actuality each one reflected a fairly homogenous range of opinions. At Baden-Baden this was because the invited "opponents" of expressive total abstraction did not appear; in Dresden, the Party line dominated most speakers' contributions.

Among the parallel events in East and West Germany that I discuss in this chapter, I identify a number of shared thematic concerns. They arise in the planning,

execution, and reception of the two exhibitions and are, in turn, reflected in the two main conferences and in other public discussions of the late 1950s. For both East and West German commentators, the most important of these concerns is the connection of contemporary art to current "reality." In both countries, the same vocabulary arises in the language of the artists, politicians, critics and historians, and lay viewers who try to define "reality" and the state of being "realistic," including *Realität* (reality), *Wirklichkeit* (objectivity), *Tatsachen* (facts), and *Wahrheit* (truth). The final definition of reality, however, differs in the two Germanies: for most of the East Germans I consider, reality is objectively tied to a collective social experience, while the majority of West Germans describe reality as subjectively perceived.

Another common concern is to identify who is responsible for determining how contemporary art should look, and a number of the East and West Germans I consider suspected that such agency did not belong to artists. Some West Germans worried about the influence of the managers of the international artworld, from academy professors to museum curators, to gallery owners and private collectors. East Germans at odds with the Party expressed concern over the increased input that the nation's workers and farmers were to have in the creation of new painting and sculpture; these artists worried that too much consultation from non-artists would result in something that was no longer art. The fear communicated by both East and West Germans in these cases is that some authority outside of the art community had determined that the representation of the countries' two distinct notions of reality could not be entrusted to the artists themselves. It seems telling in this regard that the organizers of both *documenta II* and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* were disappointed by the numbers of visitors the exhibitions attracted: the

Fourth German Art Exhibition had 120,000 visitors as compared to 200,000 in 1953 and *documenta II* had 134,000 compared to 130,000 1955 (four thousand visitors was far fewer than the increase the organizers had anticipated).[340] Perhaps what the organizers had determined would be the defining expression of reality in contemporary art, then, did not coincide with the reality perceived by their presumed viewing audiences.

PART I: NOTIONS OF FREEDOM AND THE REALITY OF ABSTRACTION IN WEST GERMANY CA. 1959

The Installation and Contextualization of Contemporary Art at *documenta II*

> The strenuous day had a marvelous ending; at a pleasant, simple reception in the Orangerie at night…even the architecture played along, with the rubble of the baroque structure magically turning into Roman ruins. The youth danced by candlelight in the open air at the feet of a gigantic goddess by Henry Moore. It felt as if one had been transported by 'Paris-Match' to Versailles or to the ruins of Baalbek.…[But] one was right in the middle of our own time and saw the future generation, with its own magic—that of youth—given the gift of confronting art with life. The upbeat jazz took on a spiritual dimension while shadows played before the goddess. The gap between life and art had been bridged, in a naïve and noticeable way.[341]

The romantic mood conjured in the critic Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen's review of the exhibition *documenta II*, held in Kassel from 11. July – 11. October 1959, is captured in a nighttime photograph of the show [Fig. 4.1]. In this image, clusters of visitors register as shadows against the brightly lit sculpture and white walls of the outdoor portion of the exhibition. The overall contrast in the shot is heightened by a row of candles that forms a diagonal of blurred bright patches running from the lower right to the left middle ground of the photograph. The outdoor installation of sculpture at the second *documenta* on the

[340] For the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* numbers see Halbrehder, 107; for *documenta* statistics, the *documenta* archive, http://www.documenta12.de/data/english/faq.html (accessed 25. August, 2005).
[341] Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen, "Die 'documenta II' in Kassel eröffnet," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 13. 7. 1959.

grounds of Kassel's still-ruined Orangerie that is depicted here was a practical response to the tremendous increase in artworks exhibited over the first *documenta* in 1955, when the total works had numbered fewer than 700. In 1959, *documenta II* included more than 700 paintings, 200 works of sculpture, and 500 graphic works.[342] Painting expanded to fill the entire Fridericianum, the neoclassical museum in the heart of Kassel that was the site of the first *documenta*. Works on paper were contained in the nearby Bellevue Palace, and sculpture was removed to the formal gardens of the Orangerie. But whatever its pragmatic function, the ruined Orangerie also had a powerful symbolic resonance, as the above photograph demonstrates. The ruined building was the embodiment of an unspecified, distant past, and its presence heightened the radical modernity of the sculpture that stood in front of it.

Like the first *documenta* in 1955, *documenta II* was organized by the artist Arnold Bode, a professor at the School of the Visual Arts in Kassel, and the art historian Werner Haftmann. Bode and Haftmann were assisted in this massive undertaking by a large support staff and funding from local, state, and federal sources. The bulk of the nearly 1500 works of art, chiefly by western European artists, was chosen by a jury of prominent West German artists, critics, and museum professionals. Work by U.S. artists was selected by Porter McCray, director of both Circulating Exhibitions and the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[343] As in 1955, Bode

[342] Kurt Winkler, "II. documenta '59 – Kunst nach 1945," in Michael Bollé and Eva Züchner, eds., *Stationen der Moderne: die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland* (Berlin: Berlinische Gallerie, 1988), 427; Stadt Kassel, "documenta I," *documenta in Stichworten*, n.d., http://www.stadt- kassel.de/miniwebs/ documentaarchiv/02258/index.html (24. September 2005).

[343] The predetermined nature of the U.S. contribution was somewhat controversial at the time because the works were so huge that they demanded much of the best exhibition space in the Fridericianum; some observers considered this a slight against the West German artists, many of whom were relegated to the museum's attic floor. The predetermination of this sampler of U.S. art has been interpreted by Cora Sol Goldstein as an example of the United States' larger project of disseminating a specific type of U.S. culture

turned the Fridericianum into a stark, practical exhibition space to house this vast collection of art by constructing a display system in which support elements like posts and beams were painted black and the panels that subdivided the galleries were painted white, grey, and black [Fig. 4.2]. Bode extended this pragmatic gallery scheme into the outdoor display areas as well by installing a series of simple, whitewashed brick walls on the grounds [Fig. 4.3]. The system of walls served as a backdrop for the larger sculptures which were arranged on the lawn, while smaller works were placed inside a similarly-constructed low portico. The still-ruined structure of the Orangerie towered above the neat, orderly white walls, a living ruin much like the Fridericianum had been in 1955 (see Chapter One).

Bode's method of subdividing the galleries in the Fridericianum was a very efficient means of creating rooms with multiple layers of display surfaces; at times, however, these rooms contained very little viewing space—particularly when crowded with visitors.[344] It is telling that reviewers repeatedly describe the space inside the

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in her article, "The Control of Visual Representation: American Art Policy in Occupied Germany, 1945-1949" (*Intelligence and National Security*, volume 18 no. 2: 283-299).

The case of U.S. art at *documenta II* should be considered in light of the large body of scholarship on the political workings behind the promotion of mid-century American painting throughout Europe in the 1950s. This includes early treatments like Max Kozloff's "American Painting During the Cold War" (*Artforum,* vol. 11, no. 9 May 1973, 43-54) and Eva Cockroft's "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War" (*Artforum*, vol.12, no. 10, June 1974, 39-41) and more recent writing such as Jeremy Lewison's "Jackson Pollock and the Americanization of Europe," in *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999); David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Nancy Jachec's, "Transatlantic Cultural Politics in the late 1950s: the Leaders and Specialists Grant Program" (*Art History*, Vol. 26 No. 4 September 2003 pp. 533–555), as well as Jachec's book on the subject, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[344] There are no existing floor plans for *documenta II* in the archive, but Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel offer a reconstruction. Unfortunately the specific rooms depicted in the photographs available from the documenta archive are not identified; for this reason I am unable to draw the kinds of conclusions about specific placement that I do in my discussion of *documenta* in Chapter Two. See *II. documenta '59: Kunst nach 1945; internationale Ausstellung. Eine fotografische Rekonstruktion* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2000).

Fridericianum as "a labyrinth" or "labyrinthine."[345] Some observers saw this maze-like arrangement of the exhibited works as positive because it offered the viewer surprising comparisons around every turn, but more frequently in the reception of *documenta II* it has a slightly negative connotation. The vast number of paintings in the Fridericianum made the enormous exhibition seem even larger; it became confusing and overwhelming for the viewer and it could turn a visit to the show into a strenuous exercise. In addition, a few critics felt that the apparently inscrutable character of much of the abstract painting which dominated *documenta II* only enhanced the labyrinthine character of the show.[346]

The available photographic record of *documenta II* helps to clarify its spatial organization and the viewers' experience in that space. Most of these photographs were taken when the galleries were fairly empty, and I assume that the spatial relations within the rooms would have changed abruptly when experienced during a rush of visitors. One example, a photograph of one of the rooms in which U.S. painting was installed, shows Bode's system of exposed beams, which extend through the gallery and support large panels that stretch from the floor almost to the ceiling. The open space left at the top of the panels and their alternating placement along the beams allow for natural light to pass through the gallery from exterior windows, visible on the left in the photograph. But in spite of this openness, even in larger galleries the arrangement of work in the Fridericianum produced quite small viewing spaces and a very dense visual field. This becomes apparent in a second photograph of the same room of U.S. painting taken from a different angle, this time down the narrow corridor formed by the alternating panels;

[345] Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel, "II. documenta 1959 – wiederbesucht nach vier Jahrzehnten," in *II. documenta '59: Kunst nach 1945*, 8.
[346] Kimpel and Stengel (ibid.) offer a wide sampling of reviewers who emphasize the sheer physical strain of working one's way through the exhibition.

based on the position of the visitors in that corridor, no more than two people could comfortably pass at once [Fig. 4.4]. A photograph from another room shows Philip Guston's *The Painter's City* (1956-1957) installed on one of the permanent brick walls of the Fridericianum with a hallway of separate galleries extending behind it [Fig. 4.5]. A final example shows how the density of the installation was intensified by the low ceilings of the Fridericianum's upper stories [Fig. 4.6]. Both of these shots indicate that, although the installation appears to allow sufficient wall space between individual paintings, there is an overall proliferation of subdivided space that seems almost relentless.

The exhibition was not only physically and visually dense, it was also dense in terms of content. Where the first *documenta* was roughly half historical survey and half contemporary showcase, at *documenta II* the emphasis was indisputably on art made after 1945. But at the 1959 show, Bode and Haftmann again invoked the past in order to situate contemporary artistic production, this time in two smaller, introductory exhibitions of about 40 works total: *Masters (Lehrmeister) of 20th-century Painting* and *Arguments of the Art of the Twentieth Century*. The first of these featured the work of Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Piet Mondrian, artists whom Werner Haftmann identified as the primary innovators in modern art and those who continued to influence contemporary artistic production. The second of the smaller shows surveyed the major styles and schools of modern art in the twentieth century: Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Surrealism, and Dada.[347] Positioned near the entrance of the exhibition, directly after the catalog and postcard stands, these two historical and historicizing mini-shows

[347] Kurt Winkler, "II. documenta '59 – Kunst nach 1945," 430.

oriented the visitor and prepared her for the rest of the exhibition.[348] Haftmann's catalog essay describes these modernist lineages at length, as I discuss in detail below; on the ground at *documenta II*, that essay provided a clear interpretation of the two historical surveys and pointed the way to an understanding of contemporary art in line with the organizers' (or at least Haftmann's) intent.

Once inside the main exhibition, the visitor saw an average of three works by most participants; a few artists, like the West German painters Ernst Wilhelm Nay and Fritz Winter, were represented with more work. In addition, memorial displays of between 10 and 15 works apiece honored four deceased artists: Willi Baumeister, Jackson Pollock, Wols, and Nicolas de Staël, at different locations throughout the museum. For *documenta II's* organizers, these four artists embodied particular high points in the development of postwar abstraction and had influenced significantly the work of other artists. The strategy of introducing a historical background and identifying especially significant (although deceased) contemporary practitioners was a didactic technique similar in spirit to the overall strategy employed by the organizers at the first *documenta* in 1955, at which the art of the early twentieth century acted as a visual presentation of the historical lineage of contemporary art (see Chapter One). But whereas the first show had been divided into two approximately equivalent parts, at the 1959 show Bode and Haftmann greatly refined the historical narrative. *documenta 2* included fewer artists, with clear emphases on the expressive abstraction of artists like Pollock and Wols, and described an apparently inevitable development towards total abstraction.

[348] Kimpel and Stengel, "II. documenta 1959 – wiederbesucht nach vier Jahrzehnten," 8.

Werner Haftmann's Catalog Introduction

As in 1955, Werner Haftmann was primarily responsible for framing the exhibition and communicating its overall mission, which he did in the catalog, in press publications, and in his speech at the show's opening. In the catalog's introduction, Haftmann writes that *documenta II* "is not intended to serve as instruction nor to act as advertisement for one particular type of art. It is meant to show [the state of things], and to be an inducement for the artist, the art lover, and the historian to experience awareness and to engage in introspection – it is not the apotheosis of the present, but the reflection of the special character [of the present], which grew out decades of intense effort and which will be the heritage of what is yet to come."[349] Haftmann uses the introduction to describe the conceptual impetus behind the show, its general organization, and its descriptive goals. I wish to look closely at some of Haftmann's formulations in this essay because it is an important document of one prominent West German art historian's efforts to define a contemporary art practice in the late 1950s.

In the introduction, Haftmann interweaves social and political commentary, art history, and theoretical concerns in order to accomplish two tasks. The first is to justify modern art as the only legitimate expression of contemporary society and reality, terms which he tends to conflate. The second is to situate the postwar art featured at *documenta II* as heir to a tradition of modern art that extends back to 1890 and which has, from its inception, anticipated the revolutionary changes in science and technology that shape the twentieth century. To support these two theses, Haftmann presents several major arguments to which he returns throughout the essay. He begins by identifying creative

[349] This was a contrast to the first *documenta*, which Bode had framed as a pedagogical opportunity for the younger artists of Germany (see Chapter One). Haftmann, untitled introduction to *II. documenta. Kunst nach 1945. Malerei - Skulptur – Druckgrafik* (Köln, Verlag DuMont Schauberg, 1959), 19.

freedom as the essential engine behind modern art. He then asserts that contemporary reality is subjectively perceived by its observer, and that modern art, because it demands subjectivity and creative freedom from the artist, is the only mode of artistic production able to truthfully reflect that reality. Haftmann likely had a dual objective in presenting this type of defense of modern art's past and present. On the one hand, he sought to promote total abstraction in the midst of the West German debate about abstraction's dominance of the art market, and on the other he offered a counter-argument to the definitions of reality and realism put forth at the time by proponents of socialist realism in East Germany and their allies in the west.

The essay begins with the author addressing the growing support that contemporary modern art enjoys among various aspects of contemporary society, as demonstrated by public commissions, the emergence of a competitive market driven by museum purchases and private collectors, and the burgeoning of art publications. This broad support, he concludes, is possible because modern art expresses "the content and form (the mode of presentation, or *Vorstellungsweise*) of contemporary life."[350] He explains this relationship by arguing that art has defined the very foundation of society. Modern artists like Cézanne and Van Gogh, he writes, "found, conceived of, suffered—completely outside of sociological and political structures—while creating a basic design that gave visible form to a newly-transformed relationship to reality and to existence. This design spread like a virus, permeating all modes of perception until finally, in its repetitions and elaborations, it produced a style that expressed the present."[351] Haftmann's formulation thus places modern artists at the core of the

[350] Ibid., 12. At this point in the essay, Haftmann has not yet defined modern art as abstract art.
[351] Ibid.

development of modern society; he claims that they anticipated that development, rather than simply illustrating it. This assertion is an important support for the rest of his arguments, because it refutes what he calls "totalitarian" accusations that modern art is removed from society.[352]

Here Haftmann introduces the second of his major theses, the necessity of creative freedom and subjectivity in artmaking. Modern art has been successful, he theorizes, precisely because it contains and expresses human freedom. The inherent freedom of modern art in turn "represents the most direct mode of confronting reality (*Wirklichkeit*) and the facts (*Tatsachen*) of one's own existence that was ever possible. It…changed relationships to reality and to human existence. Through [modern art] it was first discovered that…the [viewer's] relationship to the object determines its modes of definition and its appearance…."[353] This brief exposition on personal creative freedom and subjectivity is followed by a long discussion of the development of abstraction that lays out the different ways in which modern art refined a subjective understanding of reality that was later validated by science:

> These pictures arose from the very center of our contemporary experience of the world and of existence. They addressed the obscure concepts of science and the facts of modern life, with their hidden energies: waves, force fields, circulation, and speed. [These pictures] responded with visible depictions which contained within them a poetic metamorphosis, interpretations of the new realities of our experience and our perception of the shape of space and of the cosmos, and of the structures that comprise matter and hold it together. For this reason, the creative [visual] art responsible for these pictures has become, in the last decade, the decisive stylistic expression of our time. It has inspired great fascination in contemporary society, especially among the younger generations. (13)

[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid.

After this sweeping explanation of modern art, now specified as abstraction in its various forms, and its embeddedness in society, Haftmann elaborates on the larger political implications of the movement. Because it is a basic expression of a "personal mode of existence" (*Daseinsweise*), modern art is an irritant anywhere in which "the belief in authority, the will to power, and contemporary forms of political totalitarianism oppose the freedom of the individual."[354] In such places—he does not specify where—modern art is put on the defensive. But Haftmann also recognizes an international acceptance of modern art, "which has become a sustainable basis for worldwide interpersonal relationships."[355] Modern art has, he claims, "created, in the last decade, a human consciousness above all the inhibitions of language, custom, history, racial feelings, and local tradition."[356] When he then proposes that modern "forms of expression and perceptual modes" have led to the creation of "the idea of a world culture," and describes how "it has aroused inner correspondences from Europe to the two Americas, from Africa and Asia to the far East…making possible direct communication," Haftmann describes the spread of modern art in almost imperialistic terms. This tone is no doubt a response to East German and Soviet rhetoric of the same time that claims socialist realism as the only valid international style.[357]

And, in fact, as he turns his attention to the organization of the exhibition in the introduction's next section, Haftmann does finally address socialist realism and the situation in the GDR more directly. He explains that the organizers chose what work to

[354] Ibid., 14.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid.
[357] See, for example, Alexander Abusch's contribution to the Fourth Union of Visual Artists' Congress in *Vierter Kongress des Verbandes bildender Künstler Deutschlands* (Berlin: Verband bildender Künstler Deutschlands, 1959).

include in *documenta II* based on the principle that "quality is only possible in a work of art if it is completed without extra-artistic demands and in freedom, and that it can only be considered representative if it reflects, interprets, and advances the fundamental reality described above."[358] This requirement, Haftmann writes, effectively eliminated the "politically regulated art practice" of socialist realism from the show. "This was not a political decision, but rather a critical decision related to artistic [concerns], due first to the absence of the prerequisite of creative freedom, but also brought about by our recognition that these propagandistic, prettified descriptions were falsifying contemporary man's experience of reality."[359] This categorical negation allows Haftmann to explain a major "critical decision" without having to provide specific examples of the work that he considers invalid.[360] Although he insists that the decision to ignore East German production was not political, his repeated use of the term "totalitarian" throughout the essay and the charge that socialist realism is not created in a free context suggest otherwise. He stops just short of concluding that the name "socialist realism" itself is a misnomer.[361]

With this important clarification of socialist realism's absence from *documenta II* out of the way, Haftmann continues to describe the organization of the exhibition. He first discusses the section "Arguments of the Twentieth Century," which provided examples of the art-historical legacy of contemporary art, subdivided into Fauvism and

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[358] Ibid., 15.
[359] Ibid.
[360] It is worth noting that *documenta II* included several artists from Poland and Yugoslavia, all of whom worked in totally abstract styles, presumably because these were countries which were "less strictly culturally regulated than the GDR." These Eastern European examples would have in turn emphasized the absence of East German art and, in turn, the comparative corruptness of East German artistic production. See "Im Wolfspelz." *Der Spiegel* 29. July 1959, 52.
[361] Haftmann briefly addresses other limitations to the scope of the exhibition: the exclusion of artists' groups, and a focus on artists 30-60 years of age and, consequently, the omission of the older artists who had been featured in *documenta* in 1955.

Expressionism; Cubism; Orphism, Futurism, and Blauer Reiter; Suprematism, de Stijl, and the Bauhaus; and Pittura Metafisica, Dada, and Surrealism.[362] He then turns to the "Modern Masters" section of the show, which featured modern artist considered by the organizers to be responsible for the most significant innovations and continued resonance. This is a short list: Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Brancusi, and Gonzalez. It is the work of Kandinsky and Mondrian that Haftmann later identifies as defining the boundaries of contemporary abstraction.[363] Finally, he addresses the four small memorial shows within the exhibition for the artists Willi Baumeister, Jackson Pollock, Wols, and Nicolas de Staël. Having established this genealogy, the author is free to direct his attention to the contemporary work that comprises the ostensible focus of the exhibition.[364] But before he tells the reader what that new work is, he once again clarifies what it is not, by briefly sketching the failure of figurative art after 1945, when "the entire, great range of confrontations with the optical appearance of the objective world (*Gegendstandswelt*) provided only weak impulses."[365] Although there was a moment, between 1945 and 1950, when "it seemed that various types of figurative work such as 'art témoin,' 'art engagé,' existential interpretations of reality, socialist realism, and the mythical Verism of Mexico might indicate that a new, declamatory pathos in the description of reality was forcing its way up with a great, expressive language," exemplified by Picasso's *Guernica* and *Night Fishing in Antibes*, "even here, the quiet,

[362] Haftmann, 16.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Given the effort Haftmann expends to validate abstraction and to create a history for recent art, this focus is not always self-evident in the introduction.
[365] Haftmann, 17.

exquisitely incisive powers of persuasion of Paul Klee, Kandinsky, and Mondrian were at work."[366]

Haftmann concludes that postwar art developed in favor of these artists' innovations in abstraction, and he closes the introduction with a survey of the ways in which the influences of the modern masters are preserved and expanded upon by the most talented of *documenta II's* contemporary artists. He begins with the German painter Ernst Wilhelm Nay. Nay's work, Haftmann writes, descends from that of Klee and Kandinsky and has evolved into a "free application of color that is of a lyrical nature."[367] Nay's immense *Freiburger Bild* (Freiburg Picture) [Fig. 4.7] of 1956 was a focal point of one of the two largest galleries in the Fridericianum, in which it hung opposite Roberto Matta Echaurren's equally massive *Being With* (1946).[368] Several works by the German expatriate painter Hans Hartung hung in the same gallery, including *T 55-16 A* (1955) [Fig. 4.8]. Haftmann names Hartung as one of a number of exceptional artists who, "completely independently from one another and in a very personal way," developed a "dramatic, dynamic abstract-expressive style of painting."[369] Haftmann situates Hartung in a progression similar to the one he uses to orient Nay, attributing Hartung's expressive line and suggestive use of color to the artist's roots in German Expressionism and the influence of Kandinsky. Next, Haftmann considers the painter Wols (Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze), who like Hartung was a German artist who had left Germany. Wols had lived in Paris for the better part of his professional life before dying in 1951 at the

[366] Ibid.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Both paintings were quite large, the *Freiburg Picture* measuring roughly 8 x 21.5 feet (2.55 x 6.55 meters) and *Being With* about 7 x 15 feet. *Being With* is currently in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
[369] Haftmann, 17.

age of 38. As I have noted above, Wols was one of four artists given a commemorative exhibition within *documenta II*. The 1951 painting *Das Blaue Gespenst* (The Blue Phantom) [Fig. 4.9] was one of 41 oils, watercolors, and gouaches that hung in Wols' memorial gallery. In the catalog introduction, Haftmann praises Wols' "indescribably sensitive registration of every internal impulse," and his "freely improvised resonant bodies, [which are] made up of thin, cobweb-like strokes and appealing fields of color," characteristics that the author attributes to the influence of "Surrealism, Klee, and the early abstract sign language of Kandinsky."[370] For Haftmann, Nay, Hartung, and Wols, along with the U.S. painter Jackson Pollock, offer evidence of modern painting's continued vitality. He sees their work as a definitive support of his thesis that figurative traditions are no longer fruitful: "Art has become abstract."[371]

On the surface, Haftmann's introduction seems to speak to a West German audience that, while receptive to modern art and even to abstract works, might be wary of *documenta II's* emphasis on more recent, completely abstract modes like *Art Informel* and Abstract Expressionism. His extensive description of a modernist lineage serves to refute assertions (made earlier in the decade by Sedlmayr, Hausenstein, and others, as I discuss in Chapter One) that modern art and abstraction in particular have no connection to modern life and have distanced themselves from the realities of contemporary humanity. At the same time, when he claims the prerequisite of freedom as the primary determinant of a work's inclusion in the exhibition, Haftmann places the distinction between modern, abstract art and socialist realism at the forefront of *documenta II's* conceptual framework. I am tempted to argue that Haftmann's essay—though perhaps

[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid.

not the show itself, which was also shaped by Bode's and others' inputs—is not simply an apology for modern art but a forceful, though somewhat oblique, attack on East German socialist realism and, by extension, on figurative representation in the west as well.

Abstraction's Political Potential

At the exhibition's opening on 11. July 1959, Haftmann used the ideas he had laid out in the Introduction in order to characterize modern art as a barometer of personal and political freedom:

> In Nazi Germany, modern art was persecuted for twelve years because it embodied a contrarian expression of the free individual who insisted on his self-realization; it thus opposed the dictates of the totalitarian manipulation of the masses…Today the zones of human freedom and suppression that carve up the political world are determined much more exactly and are defined intellectually in terms of attitudes towards the freedom of the creative being, the most obvious index of which is attitudes towards modern art. Where there is repression, Totalitarianism in all its varieties, there modern art continues to be persecuted.[372]

As he describes the contemporary situation of creative freedom, Haftmann implicitly compares the National Socialist dictatorship and the Soviet Union and, what was more pressing given the geographical context of *documenta II* less than 50 kilometers from the border, the German Democratic Republic. Without making direct mention of any specific policies, Haftmann asserts that proof of the totalitarian aspirations of Communist or socialist states like the USSR and the GDR can be found in their attitudes towards modern art. He further identifies the core difference between the world views of capitalist West Germany and the socialist GDR by stating that modern art "brought the freedom of

[372] Werner Haftmann, opening address, *documenta II.* 11. July 1959. Reprinted in Manfred Schneckenburger, ed., *Documenta – Idee und Institution: Tendenzen, Konzepte, Materialien* (München: Bruckmann, 1983), 54-56.

self-realization and [the freedom] to determine our specific existence in the world," and that modern art's nurturing of individualism, "in a world otherwise divided by hate, has generated unexpected harmony among contemporary humanity, suddenly illuminating a new, fraternal commonality."[373]

Haftmann uses this opening address to repeat the assertion he made in the catalog introduction that modern art has united the western (non-Communist) world. He declares it again to be "the first example of world culture," and he claims the overwhelming dominance of total abstraction at *documenta II* as an illustration of that worldwide harmony, a move that in turn validates the choices made by him and the show's other organizers.[374] Haftmann describes a younger, international generation of artists, the artists in the majority at *documenta II*, who "recognize that they are dealing with a common task: the creative coming to terms with our fantastic, ever-expanding reality, a task which expresses itself as work and form."[375] He argues as well that the emotional content of modern art creates a necessary foil to the ongoing discoveries of science and technology. In effect, Haftmann strives in this speech to humanize contemporary modern art, to counteract arguments inherent to assertions by the East German Communist party, the SED, that modern art and the individualistic artist are necessarily nihilistic. Indeed, Haftmann's concern with tying contemporary art to the experience of contemporary life closely resembles the goals expressed by East German art historians, critics, and artists

[373]Ibid., 55.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid., 56.

throughout the 1950s. As I address in the second half of this chapter, the necessity of art's connection to socialist society is the determining factor behind socialist realism.[376]

Whether or not Bode's and Haftmann's omission of socialist realism from the exhibition was politically motivated, the show itself was not without an expressly political aspect. Reviewers noted, as they had in response to the first *documenta* in 1955, the city of Kassel's proximity to the border and thus to the "Soviet occupied zone." Travel between East and West Germany was increasingly difficult by1959, but the organizers of the 1959 show still expected visitors from East Germany. In fact, the Ministry for Greater German Matters provided additional financial support for the show. An exchange of letters between the Ministry and the *documenta II* staff reveals that this government office, which monitored the political and cultural situation of the GDR, agreed to take on the costs of travel, room, and board, as well as entrance to the exhibition and a copy of the (expensive) exhibition catalog.[377] The ministry made clear that its support of the exhibition was expressly political in nature, and that *documenta II* would help communicate a message of West German cultural superiority:

> I pledge this support as an acknowledgement of the appeal the exhibition will have for our neighbors [in the GDR]. This will strengthen the conviction among the population of [eastern] central Germany that the Federal Republic is the only ambassador of true and authentic cultural preservation in Germany, and that here, in contrast to the Soviet Zone, the intellect/spirit (*Geist*) is not only free to develop, but may also present the widest imaginable range of cultural production for public discussion.[378]

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[376] Haftmann may also be addressing criticisms of the dominance of abstraction raised by critics in the Federal Republic (see below).
[377] See for example letters dated 19. 3. 1959 and 9. 4. 1959 from Zahn to Arnold Bode (Documenta Archiv, *documenta II*, File 25). This same exchange makes clear that the Ministry refused to fund anything above these costs and referred Bode and his colleagues to the Interior Ministry for additional financial support.
[378] Letter from Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen to Arbold Bode, 22.6.59 (Documenta Archiv, *documenta II*, File 25).

Clearly *documenta II* addressed an East German audience, whether a friendly or hostile one. This is not surprising when we consider that Haftmann and his counterparts in the GDR were working towards the same goal: the creation of a new German art, historically grounded as well as anchored in contemporary, international reality, which would be recognized by the world as representing German culture exclusively.

documenta II and the Definition of Realism in Contemporary Criticism

Bode and Haftmann's emphasis on total abstraction and the virtual absence of figurative art at *documenta II* drew criticism from many of the show's reviewers. This critique was part of a wider cultural backlash against what some saw as the dominance of abstraction in both West Germany's commercial artworld and in public commissions (whether local, state, or federal). A lengthy review in the *Erlangener Tageblatt* offers one of the more nuanced of these negative assessments:

> By presenting a fragment as the whole, [*documenta II*] loses its documentary quality: it does not 'document,' but rather polemicizes against figurative (*gegenständliche*) art and in favor of 'great abstraction.'" Any artist who did not fit into the concept of the organizers, who are devoted to non-objective (*ungegenständlich*) art, was left out. Among those not represented are the socially accented expressionism of the Italian Guttuso and the Frenchman Fougeron, the magical realists of England and America, the leading American 'realist' Ben Shan [sic], the Mexican 'verists,' and finally the Frenchman Bernard Buffet and his followers.[379]

The same author complains, as did other critics, that the historical section of the exhibition, *Masters of 20th-Century Art*, proved that abstraction had already reached its apex earlier in the century. The newer work on the upper floors of the show offered nothing but poor imitations: "Tachism, abstract impressionism and expressionism,

[379] When he calls Shahn a realist, the author puts the term in quotation marks; this may indicate that the definition is determined as much by Shahn's painting as it is by his public discussion of figurative representation, and his own conception of a socially-engaged, and thus realist, style. Helmuth Kotschenreuther, "Schützenfest der Tachisten," *Erlangener Tageblatt* 1. September 1959.

'informel' painting, all this is already present in Kandinsky's work, at least in its initial stages." The work of Alberto Burri and Robert Rauschenberg, he argues, was nothing but a weaker variant of Kurt Schwitter's Dadaist constructions, which were appropriate to Schwitter's own time but, at the end of the 1950s, were no longer radical; they had been "sold out, promoted, premiered, and exhibited with deadly seriousness at *documenta*."[380] A similar argument was made by another critic:

> Our wallpapers, the fabric we use as curtains and clothing have incorporated the color and shape of abstract painting. It has become a fashion, and thus can offer the viewer nothing shocking, nothing that grabs him and stirs him up; he is already familiar with everything. The time has long since passed that abstract art was revolutionary, the antithesis of the fashionable painters of the turn of the century whose own work matched photography in the refinement of its execution. [Abstract painting] has served its purpose. In our time it has itself become the thesis, awaiting a new antithesis. And that is precisely what the visitor at Documenta II misses.[381]

In the writer's estimation, abstraction has become commonplace, and the overwhelming homogeneity among the abstract work at documenta II is proof that contemporary art is unable to exceed its own history and has reached an impasse.

Raising a different objection, the reviewer for *Der Spiegel* questions whether the exhibition is really a document of artistic production since the end of the war:

> What is also clear is that the jurors in Kassel helped cultivate the impression that the art of the world has become abstract. The jury…can't be blamed for not finding anything worth exhibiting among those painters who still render seascapes and frigates, mountain-ringed lakes, or forest streams; there was also no reason to provide space for representatives of politically dictated "socialist realism." But the lack of examples of painting that has achieved artistic success through a type of synthesis between realism and expressionism – as represented by the Mexican Diego Rivera, the Frenchman Bernard Buffet, the Italian Renato Guttuso – contradicts the claims of the exhibition to 'document' art since 1945.[382]

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[380] Ibid.
[381] Otthein Rammstedt, "Wann wird die abstrakte Kunst unmodern?" *Oberhessische Zeitung* 30. September 1959.
[382] "Im Wolfspelz." *Der Spiegel* 29. July 1959, 50-53.

Countering Haftmann's explanation in the introduction that the work of these artists "lacked real consequence and ended quickly in its own mannerism," the *Spiegel* reviewer notes that "this may be true, but it can also be applied to a large number of the abstract painters who nevertheless were accepted into Documenta."[383] The same reviewer notes that a number of the "masters" that Haftmann did include are also without any real continued following; they are part of *documenta 2*, he assumes, because their work was totally abstract.[384]

Klaus Jürgen-Fischer, editor of the journal *das Kunstwerk*—a magazine generally sympathetic to total abstraction—argues in his review of the exhibition that the inclusion of these "modern masters" confuses the overall message of the exhibition, which should have been more closely focused on only the very latest artistic production. He argues that tachism is already outmoded and that new art, in contrast, is concerned with "a wider search for contacts, a search for a new stabilization of values." At *documenta II*, tachism overshadowed this "new art, which strives for order."[385] For Fischer, the narrative of stylistic heritage created by the "modern masters" section was a selective one involving choices which, like the historical framing of the first *documenta*, made art history work to the organizer's advantage. For Fischer, both the emphasis on the historical background of recent art and the broad scope of the show, reaching back fifteen years, detract from the engagement with modern reality that Haftmann claimed was the show's emphasis.

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[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Jürgen-Fischer (61) mentions Sam Francis as one of the few paitners who has achieved that order. Klaus Jürgen-Fischer, "Die II. Documenta in Kassel – Fazit eines Unbehagenen." *Das Kunstwerk* 2-3/XIII Aug.-Sept. 1959, 30-64.

The criticisms of *documenta II* that I've surveyed here were not unique to that exhibition but were instead part of the ongoing West German discussion of the proliferation and validity of total abstraction within contemporary art that have been the focus of my previous chapters. The second *documenta* did however raise the stakes of this debate, which became more pronounced in response to the show. In one such response, the editors of the art journal *Das Kunstwerk* published a special issue on realism and modern art in October 1959, the same month that *documenta II* closed. The editors sought in part to address the negative reception of *documenta II* in smaller, regional newspapers, many of which had claimed that *documenta II* had neglected figurative contemporary art. *Das Kunstwerk's* special issue also addressed what the editors saw as the *Provinzredakteure's* ("provincial editors") false perpetuation of the opposition of figuration and abstraction, which appeared repeatedly in reviews of the second *documenta*. Introducing the issue, the editorial staff of *Das Kunstwerk* recognize that there continue to be active protests against abstract styles among the West German public, and they emphasize the sometimes indistinct boundary between figurative and abstract within contemporary art:

> Is there a modern realism? This question is especially timely because in the discussion surrounding the second documenta in Kassel there was frequent mention of a dictatorship of the abstract artist, preventing the figurative (*gegenständlichen*) contribution to modern art from coming forward…It is apparent that the accomplishments of figurative painting and sculpture remain noteworthy. But today's realism is hardly conceivable without cubism, surrealism, and abstract painting, all of which posed the real questions…We also find it significant that recent figurative painting shies away from a confrontation with any technical objects specific to the modern human. [The artist] chooses objects as if the environment of humanity has not changed in any way in the last hundred years. While realism is still alive, in most cases it flees contemporary life, preferring still life or genre scenes and retreating into the private sphere.[386]

[386] Untitled forward, *das Kunstwerk* 4/XIII Oct. 1959, 3.

The above quotation indicates that, as a whole, the magazine views the concept of a valid realist mode of representation in contemporary art with skepticism. But rather than defining "realism" up front, the editors insist that that mode is not consistent from artist to artist and that, regardless of its figurative elements, it is heavily dependent on abstraction. This thesis is carried through in the issue's individual essays, whose authors use terms like *Realismus* (realism), *Figuration* (figuration) and *gegenständlich* (objective) interchangeably to mean essentially any kind of representation which is not totally abstract, and they discuss artists such as Bernard Buffet, Ben Shahn, and Renato Guttuso as making use of "schematic," "abstracted," or "reduced" forms. The overall tone of the articles is that reality is observed and reproduced differently by each artist, and that each remains a modernist and maintains his individuality in spite of a figurative approach. Taken as a whole, the essays published in *Das Kunstwerk's* realism issue contend that figurative art continues to be viable, as long as it is historically grounded and builds on modernist developments.

There is an implicit distinction here between western figurative painting and Soviet or East German socialist realism, which insists on the necessity of artists communicating one, cohesive reality. As it offers a review of the debate at hand, Waldemar George's introductory essay, "Paradoxes of Realism," places the problems of socialist realism front and center. George describes socialist realism not as "a school of art in which the consequences of earlier schools take their place and which orients itself in a historical cycle" but as "a dead language which is forced onto the artists by the authorities."[387] He further asserts that "[socialist realism] stands in complete contradiction to the true spirit of socialism. Marx's teachings, a strict scientific view of

[387] Waldemar George, "Paradoxe über den Realismus," *Das Kunstwerk* 4/XIII October 1959, 3-6.

history…and of social and historical events, seem only justly applied to an understanding of the art of the twentieth century if they take into account the type of experience typified by cubism and constructivism."[388] George, like Haftmann and other similarly-minded contemporaries in West Germany, dismisses socialist realism as something other than art because its formal language is regressive and because it ignores modernism's investigation of the changes in experience and perception that have occurred in the twentieth century. When George finally proposes a definition for a modern realism, he comes quite close to describing surrealism:

> [The new realism will be] not the disapproval, but a transgression (going-beyond) of abstract painting…It seems that there is no longer a regularly-drawn boundary between abstract art and figurative, realistic art. Post-abstract painting is not a stroke backwards. It is a new embodiment of signs…The appearance of objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) it endeavors to achieve will be merely the direct carrier of a fiction. The pictures or ghosts of pictures will be used only in order to activate the secret mechanisms of the imagination, not in order to restrain it.[389]

The "Management" of Modern Art

Das Kunstwerk also responded to a second objection raised by numerous reviewers of *documenta II*: the suspicion that the contemporary artworld was driven or controlled by the orchestrations of a small group of international dealers and collectors, who as a body promoted total abstraction while ignoring figurative modes of production. A small scandal had brought this issue to the West German press just before the second *documenta* opened, in July 1959, when the Stuttgart Academy of Visual Arts publicly protested the composition of the jury responsible for awarding the West German Young Artists' Prize. The problem arose when the jury for the Young Artist's Prize awarded all

[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.

of its prizes to completely abstract works. The sculptor Friederich Werthmann received the show's first prize of ten thousand marks, while the three painters Horst Antes, Heimrad Prem, and Otto Piene, and the sculptor Emil Cimiotti received smaller awards.[390] Werthmann's sculpture *Struktur Francesca* (*Structure Francesca*) [Fig. 4.10] is built up of strips of steel welded together and organized into multiple horizontal planes around several slender vertical poles, on which the larger structure rests.[391] In Piene's *Bronze and Gold* [Fig. 4.11], a relief painting with concentric rings on a rectangular canvas, a resolutely geometrical composition is dissolved through its own construction by a field of raised points and, presumably, by the reflective quality of the paint.[392] Prem's painting *Steinläuse* (*Stone Lice*) [Fig. 4.12] is made up of a thickly-painted ground overlaid with dark, spidery lines. In certain areas, such as the top right and bottom center, in which they are especially heavily clustered, these lines seem to suggest some kind of figures—perhaps the lice of the title. But otherwise there is no recognizable imagery in the composition.[393] Of the three paintings, Antes' *Bildnis* (Portrait) is the most

[390] The prizes the painters received were worth two thousand, one thousand, and five hundred marks; Cimiotti's was worth two thousand. See *Deutscher Kunstpreis der Jugend 1959* (Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1959). Works by the prize-winning artists are set apart from the rest of the reproductions, and I assume that these were, in fact, the works for which the artists received awards, but the catalog does not specify this.
[391] The same work appears in the artist's catalog raisonné with the title *Strukturma* (Steel, 210 x 70 x 50 cm Photo credit: Maren Heyne, from http://www.werthmann-skulptur.de/1957/052.html).
[392] I have to guess at the effects of the paint because I have been unable to locate a color reproduction of the work, but in the catalog preface Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen refers to the "vibration" Piene brings forth in the "grey-gold" painting. See untitled introduction, *Deutscher Kunstpreis der Jugend 1959* (Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1959), np.
[393] The painting has the same layering of thickly-applied ground and thin, flexible drawing overlaid that the artist used in his well-known *Manifest* from 1960 in the collection of the Kunsthalle Emden. *Steinläuse* were the subject of a famous sketch by the German comedian Loriot on German television in 1976, but Prem's painting, made 17 years earlier, indicates that there was already an existing tradition around this fictional insect. A painting of stone lice is the equivalent of a painting of a Jackalope in the United States. A painting of an imaginary animal has interesting implications in the context of abstraction: while the viewer is unable to discern a recognizable subject in the highly abstract painting, the ostensible subject is, itself, not real.

representational, with a grimacing, widely-disproportional human figure filling the entire space of the canvas [Fig. 4.13].

Albert Schulze Vellinghausen, the author of the catalog's introduction, notes that the prize-winning works are evidence "that impulses from the side of non-objective (*nichtgegenständliche*) art allow themselves to a certain degree to be modified as suggestive cues or emanations without placing the young artist in a situation of slave-like dependency."[394] But for the protesting members of the Stuttgart Academy, the work premiered at Baden-Baden was not the result of the young artists' engagement with existing accomplishments of abstraction. Rather, the Academy members complained that "to anyone who is the least bit familiar with the situation, [the jury] must appear far too lopsided…[The competition suggests] "that young artists are being influenced in a manipulative way to the benefit of a single, one-sided form of artistic expression."[395] In the weeks following the Academy's announcement, a debate on the legitimacy of abstraction played out in the pages of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.[396] The critic Clara Menck's initial assessment frames this protest as the end of the neutrality of the academy, a crisis symptomatic of growing instability within the West German artworld. Menck repeats recent suggestions that, because the dissolution of the object within the work of art has reached its maximum and can go no further, continued experiments in total abstraction are useless. She also elaborates on the Academy's claim that a "single,

[394] Albert Schulze-Vellinghausen, untitled introduction, *Deutscher Kunstpreis der Jugend 1959* (Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1959), np.
[395] As quoted by CM (Clara Menck), "Ende eines Burgfriedens – Stuttgarter Akademie zum Dirigismust in der Kunst," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7. July 1959, 10. The Young Artist's Prize was formerly an award presented in the state of Baden-Württemberg; the prize became national in 1959.
[396] CM (Clara Menck), "Ende eines Burgfriedens,"10; Ursula Binder-Hagelstange, "Kunstneurosen und Schablonen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9. July 1959, 9; Egon Vietta, Letter to the Editor, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11. July 1959, 2. A summary of the debate is given in *Das Kunstwerk* 2-3/XIII, August-September 1959, 79.

one-sided form of artistic expression" was being promoted in West Germany by pointing out that, with the exception of one member, the juries of the exhibition *Deutsche Kunst* in Baden-Baden in 1959 and the 1959 Young Artist's Prize were comprised of the same painters (the sculptors serving on the juries varied).[397] Menck concludes that, at least in terms of painting, one group is responsible for making all important decisions in West German art, especially in regard to the support of younger artists.

The art critic Ursula Binder-Hagelstange further extends this thesis in her response to Menck's initial account. Binder-Hagelstange describes a sort of doublespeak used by West German art critics who promote fashionable abstraction (riding on the "myth of documenta") to an public audience that is "dumbly floundering, mad for something to worship, and [comprised of] often powerful consumers." At the same time, she writes, these critics are much less enthusiastic in their own internal assessments of new art. Binder-Hagelstange asserts that curators and critics have too much power and that recent artwork seems to be made on speculation and to cater to the "tastes of a powerful dictator," and she criticizes young artists for making art that is merely tomfoolery (*Spielereien*) not suitable for exhibition. She, like Menck, implies that the West German academies are not teaching young artists the fundamentals of composition and drawing, but are instead encouraging playful experimentation.[398]

In his reply to these two appraisals of the situation, the critic Egon Vietta expresses his frustration that all debates on art in the Federal Republic reduce the situation to an either-or of abstraction or figuration, and he insists that the country's most

[397] CM (Clara Menck), "Ende eines Burgfriedens – Stuttgarter Akademie zum Dirigismust in der Kunst," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7. July 1959, 10.
[398] Ursula Binder-Hagelstange, "Kunstneurosen und Schablonen," 9. The "powerful dictator" comment is striking. It recalls Karl Hofer's oblique reference to Will Grohmann as a "new Goebbels" in 1951 (See Chapter One).

respected critics accept both (!) kinds of contemporary art as valid. Vietta rejects the suggestion that galleries are talking down to the public in order to sell art, that, on the contrary, "galleries are multiplying in Germany because a lively interest has appeared among the public, one which, by the way, coincides with similar tendencies in Paris and in other countries, not to mention the United States." He questions why "this spontaneous, deliberate development" should "immediately be interpreted as power politics?" Vietta acknowledges that the current phase of the *informel* will pass once a suitable replacement has evolved, but he "resolutely refuse[s] to allow the current lack of an objective (*gegenständlichen*) genius who could measure up to Riopelle, Wols, or Hartung, Baumeister or many promising younger artists to be blamed on the non-objective artists."[399] This, he claims, is the underlying polemic of criticisms like Menck's and Binder-Hagelstange's.

Total abstraction was in a different, more integrated position within the West German artworld in 1959 than it had been even at the time of the first *documenta* in 1955. Generally, the criticism leveled at supporters of *informel*, tachism, and other expressive total abstraction does not declare these styles to be invalid. In the above examples, the first two critics suggest means to what might be called a more traditionally rigorous total abstraction: Menck calls for more attention to the composition of the picture, while Binder-Hagelstange proposes that a closer inspection of instances of abstraction in nature might offer a new way of considering the object. Rather than seeking to censure total abstraction, critiques like those of Menck and Binder-Hagelstange attempt to apply existing criteria for judging the work of art to the newer, more fashionable, totally abstract styles. Their strongest objections are aimed at the apparent preferential treatment

[399] Egon Vietta, Letter to the Editor, 2.

of abstract styles by galleries and academies, especially in cases in which, as they see it, the artist lacks the fundamentals of artistic training. Menck, Binder-Hagelstange, and others argue that insufficiently-trained artists succeed in the commercial artworld only because of a cartel of gallerists, academics, and critics favors total abstraction. Vietta explicitly denies this, as did his colleagues at *Das Kunstwerk*. In late October 1959, just after *documenta II* closed its doors, the editors of that journal organized a public symposium in Baden-Baden, "Is Modern Art Being 'Managed'?" in order to address the increasingly common claim of manipulation within the West German and larger western artworld.[400] Here, as elsewhere at the time, the validity of total abstraction and the apparent control of the artworld are two closely-connected issues.

Although the more strident opponents of total abstraction who had been invited to the conference, including Hans Sedlmayr, author of *Loss of the Center*, did not appear, not everyone participating in the symposium was a supporter of recent developments in contemporary art.[401] This is true of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who had been an important promoter of Parisian modernism, particularly cubism, in the early twentieth century. At the symposium he represented the community of art dealers. Kahnweiler maintains in his contribution that there are no secret manipulations at work in the art market, but that those artists who make non-representational art simply are providing for a growing

[400] The symposium was held on the 30. and 31. of October. See *Wird die moderne Kunst "gemanagt"?* (Baden-Baden: Agis-Verlag, 1959). One speaker, frequent *Kunstwerk* contributer Egon Vietta, included in the debate a somewhat older, inflamatory review of the Venice Biennale published in the magazine *Stern* (3. September 1958) by its publisher, Henri Nannen, himself a collector of modern art. See *Wird die moderne Kunst "gemanagt"?*, 21.

[401] In 1959 Sedlmayr and his book *Verlust der Mitte* continued to be at the center of the dissent against total abstraction. Other invited guests like Alois Melichar, Max Picard, Max Unold, Wladimir Weidlé, and Hans Weiger, had authored various texts along similarly conservative lines. See *Wird die moderne Kunst "gemanagt"?*, 8.

audience of consumers. He is also quite clear that this process, and the recent explosion of total abstraction in general, leaves him cold:

> Painting is a written language, one which shapes our environment. But to speak of the 'conditions of the soul' and other nonsense, of non-representational (*nichtdarstellende*) pictures, is to engage in idle chatter…The non-representational painting of our time is, in truth, an applied art, nothing else. True painting creates signs which, when properly read, evoke the viewer's outside world. But today this pretentious craft has spread itself over the entire world…There was already a general diffusion similar to this: the academic Salon art of the second half of the nineteenth century.[402]

For Kahnweiler, an aging champion of modernism, contemporary non-representational painting is craft or, worse, academic art, "the application of forms and techniques whose true essence has been lost. What are [total] abstraction and its after-effects if not academic misunderstandings of fauvism, cubism, surrealism?"[403]

While Kahnweiler did not support the thesis that the artworld was manipulated in favor of total abstraction in its various forms, another contributor, Jürgen Beckelmann, offered both a critique of total abstraction and of the market which demanded it. His criticisms are distinctly socially-oriented an were understood by his audience as Marxist in tone:

> [A]bstraction (*Gegendstandslosigkeit*) in art is nothing other than a sign for a complete lack of an image of the world (*Weltbildlosigkeit*)! Many artists feel, to a nearly desperate degree, that they must reflect on themselves, and that there is nothing left for them to do but to express their pure individuality in pure painting. […] The subjective artist, and especially one who produces in an abstract (*gegendstandslose*) manner, is completely antisocial: he does not depict anything that relates directly to society and its current situation…The consequences of this type of composition do not touch society, they lead away from it into the realm of "general human problems" or of "pure beauty." Even the wrath of certain abstract

[402] Ibid., 18.
[403] Ibid., 19. Art critic Egon Vietta's brief contribution to the discussion echoed Karl Hofer's warnings earlier in the decade of a reactionary tendency among the opponents of modernist art: "I have nothing against doubt, and nothing against debates on art, which are always a testament to life. But the fact that among a certain group doubt is accompanied by the same derogatory vocabulary as it was in 1911 and the following years, and then again in 1933 in its most massive form—this fact requires that we ask, who's 'managing' what?" *Wird die moderne Kunst "gemanagt"?*, 23.

> expressionists remains generalized. One may be moved by it, but the conscious mind need not react to it.[404]

For Beckelmann, total abstraction's lack of social connection explains its popularity with the West German state, industry, and even the church, all "supporters of a non-intact society" because art that is socially engaged "tends to be fairly critical." In Beckelmann's analysis, total abstraction protects institutions from social critique, "and it is to this that [non-representational painting] owes its support from the state, which is now referred to as 'management'."[405]

The sociologist Arnold Gehlen, meanwhile, suggests that *documenta II* was proof, if not of widespread manipulation in the artworld, then of a gross failure on the part of art critics resulting in a lack of sufficient filtering of the contemporary art which received public attention: "There was simply so much at *documenta*, there cannot possibly be that much good [art]."[406] But the printmaker and educator H.A.P. Grieshaber, the only artist to participate in the symposium, argues that West Germany received its introduction to world art after the war almost exclusively at the hands of the art market. While he criticizes the market for pushing arbitrary examples that are difficult for the young artist to ignore, Grieshaber argues that only a weak artist would allow himself to be moved by the market. Without the "management" of the art market, Grieshaber argues, West

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[404] Ibid., 26-27. Beckelmann left the GDR in the early 1950s but worked for various socialist periodicals, always representing a very clear Marxist interpretation but avoiding, as he does in this essay, any outright prescriptions for contemporary art. See "Jürgen Beckelmann," *Sonntagsgeschichten*, n.d., http://members.aol.com/KHJakobs/jube.htm (accessed 28. September 2005).

[405] Beckelmann also offers evidence of artists living in various parts of Germany who are working in figurative modes. He notes that these artists look to surrealism, expressionism, and Neue Sachlichkeit for historical, modernist inspiration, countering (though not very aggressively) the widespread contemporary assumption that total abstraction was the only valid heir to earlier modernist styles. *Wird die moderne Kunst "gemanagt"?*, 28-31.

[406] Summary of Arnold Gehlen's talk, ibid., 32.

Germany would remain out of touch with the rest of the contemporary artworld, experiencing a plight that is uniquely German:

> We are still suffering from an incorrect confrontation with 1945: modern art on this side, leftover art of the Third Reich on this side. We are suffering because of a plebiscite, an imaginary questionnaire that hangs over our heads asking, What is your opinion of modern art? What reasons would you cite? Which of the exhibited artworks do you disapprove of, and why? In your opinion, which type of art would be better suited to our time?[407]

In Grieshaber's assessment, the younger generation of West German artists—his students—have none of these hangups and are simply eager to engage with new ideas.[408]

It seems important to reiterate that among the conference participants at "Is Modern Art Being 'Managed'?" Kahnweiler, Beckelmann and Grieshaber all spell out who is doing the managing: the state, the church, gallerists and dealers. The symposium moderator, Max Bense, asks whether "productive energy [is] inhibited by these various managers, is it really controlled in terms of its content? Some [of the speakers] said yes, and that when content is prescribed, art is less free." But Bense presses on: "In our technological civilization, can art only ever flourish on the basis of absolute freedom, or is it not possible that creativity can arise under duress?"[409] This suggestion is soundly dismissed by Karl Fischer, the publisher of *Das Kunstwerk*, who adamantly rejects the theses put forward by Beckelmann in particular. Fischer dismisses Beckelmann's socialist understanding of the situation and paints a grim picture of the consequences of accepting what he sees as a left-wing interpretation of art and society:

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[407] Ibid., 36. This may be a reference to the process of denazification and its ineffectiveness (see Chapter Two).
[408] Grieshaber's neutral response to the role of the market in determining the direction of contemporary art is especially notable because he himself worked in an abstracted figurative style, and the human figure accounts for the majority of his subjects. The fact that he, a figurative artist, did not feel threatened in the face of encroaching total abstraction resonated with the audience at the Baden-Baden conference.
[409] *Wird die moderne Kunst "gemanagt"?*, 57.

> The wolf lurking in the background [needs] only to cleverly disguise himself in order to reward us with a new value system one day as we sleep. [This system] will tidy up the jumbled values of the sheep with the absolute values of the wolves. We've seen this before, gentlemen, although not in the form of muscular proletarians or the idyllic rural collective, but in the form of portraits of crusaders and virtuous SS men. Once this new value hierarchy is established, we won't need to discuss abstract art or 'management' in art…Then we will no longer be able to work for our selves, but only for the future. And on the part of the functionaries we will experience a type of statism in art that will make a private manager seem like a poor little waif. We will lose our ability to hear and see, probably even to breathe…Because according to this conception only society or the state can establish general values, not the individual, who's been devoured by his fear. He needs only to swallow the new values. If he chokes on them, it's his own fault.[410]

Fischer agrees that art is being manipulated in both east and west by various "managers," but he asserts that, were he to become dependent on one, he'd prefer it to be a "private capitalist rather than the omnipotent functionary of a state apparatus." He reasons that both "control the means of production (to use the socialist jargon), one as its private owner, the other as its administrator. I am exploited by both. But with every private person I have a chance at personal freedom, even if I might not have freedom itself. With the functionary I have no chance—at most, I have the chance of being shot in the neck."[411]

What Fischer is describing here is a nearly paranoid scenario, not uncommon in the Federal Republic of the 1950s, in which the agents of the GDR threaten to infiltrate the west. He is convinced that with shrewd dialectics—like Beckelmann's—those agents plan to erode the confidence of the West Germans, who in their weakened state will allow the GDR and the Soviets to step in. The fears provoked by the West German labor strikes

[410] Fischer's argument is strikingly similar in language and thrust to those made by Karl Hofer and the Künstlerbund in the early part of the decade, and in fact *das kunstwerk*, under Fischer's leadership, was a staunch supporter of Hofer's efforts to prevent a slide into retro-fascistic control of the arts. In 1959, the focus of Fischer's concerns, however, had shifted from the far right in West Germany to the East Germans. Ibid., 60.
[411] Ibid., 62.

of 1952, which I discuss in Chapter Two, seem to endure in 1959. Although he differentiates himself from the "conservative professional mourners of the 'loss of the center'," a reference to Hans Sedlmayr's book *The Loss of the Center*, Fischer's anti-GDR rhetoric reflects a deep distrust not only of the East Germans, but also of socialists within the Federal Republic.

At the second *documenta* Werner Haftmann had tried to secure contemporary art for abstraction by crafting an historical lineage of abstract art that ranged from the Cubists, through Kandinsky, Klee, and Mondrian. But at the end of the 1950s, total abstraction, while secure in the West German artworld that *documenta II* epitomized, was by no means universally accepted by all West Germans. This is made clear in the critique against *documenta II* that abstraction "[in] our time…has itself become the thesis, awaiting a new antithesis."[412] The insistent presence of such critiques in West German discussions of contemporary art is in turn thrown into relief by Fischer's defensive, even hysterical warning that to entertain any kind of representation outside of the abstract modern canon would be to invite certain Communist doom. Confronted by the overwhelming popularity of total abstraction, some West German commentators suspected that the expression of subjective reality described by Haftmann as the lifeblood of contemporary art might be the result of some kind of larger orchestration rather than the result of individual perception.

[412] Otthein Rammstedt, "Wann wird die abstrakte Kunst unmodern?"

PART II: THE REALITY OF EAST GERMAN SOCIALIST REALISM

From Thaw to Freeze. The Aftermath of the Third German Art Exhibition

From the early days of the campaign for socialist realism, members of the SED and allied artists, art historians, and critics called for art which would reflect life in Germany's new socialist environment in both content and form. In 1947, for example, Max Grabowski argued in the SED organ *Einheit* that

> a work of art which has as its subject matter themes from the life and events of our time, but which makes use of an artistic form of expression more appropriate to the lifestyle and intellectual attitudes of earlier times and which, for example, falls under the rubrics of romantic, classicistic, naturalistic, or impressionistic, that work of art cannot claim to be progressive. In order to make a progressive work of art, one which has meaning for the culture of our time, the creator must be not only a progressive person who correctly interprets the features of contemporary life, but he must also be a progressive artist, one who recognizes the artistic form appropriate to this era and who understands how to shape it.[413]

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, the Party leadership and East Germany's artists alike hoped that the *Third German Art Exhibition* in 1953 would finally demonstrate that East German artists had succeeded in meeting these requirements for progressive (socialist) art and were well on their way to the creation of a German socialist realism. In the exhibition catalog, Union of Visual Artists' chair Otto Nagel describes East German artists as committed to addressing the "progressive, societal, and cultural experiences of our times" and he writes that "[t]he entire passionate participation of the working person in the creation of a [Socialist] basis in the German Democratic Republic is reflected in the creations of our artists."[414] But in the end the exhibition was a failure at presenting a

[413] Max Grabowski, "Zur bildenden Kunst der Gegenwart," *Einheit*, October 1947. Reprinted in Elimar Schubbe, *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 73-75.
[414] Otto Nagel, untitled essay in *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953), n.p.

cohesive socialist realist style or method that met the expectations of either the Party or the artists' union. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the tension between past and present prevented a cohesive style from developing, as the *Third German Art Exhibition* demonstrated. After 1953, East German art was left in a confused state as artists and critics struggled to determine the causes of the *Third German Art Exhibition's* failure and ascertain how best to move forward.

The weakness embodied by the 1953 exhibition in Dresden was complicated further by the onset of de-Stalinization that same year, during which the GDR's existing modes of cultural production were called into question. After the crisis of the 17. June 1953, in which massive worker protests nationwide threw the GDR into a brief but violent upheaval, East German artists and writers pressed for reforms in the organization of the country's various cultural organizations, such as the Academy of Arts and the Union of Visual Artists. Members of these groups also called on the Party to reform its approach to cultural production. In a statement issued on 2. July 1953, the Academy of Arts demanded that "The artist's responsibility towards the public must be recovered…State agencies must support art in every conceivable way but must refrain from engaging in any administrative action in matters of artistic production and style."[415] The writer Wolfgang Harich's article in the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* on 14. July 1953 represented the peak of these calls for accountability. In it, Harich takes to task the State Commission for Art and its allied critics for intimidating artists into ineffectiveness; they are, he writes, "primarily responsible for causing creative crises of a psychotic nature even among outstanding artists who stand firmly on the foundation of our

[415] "Vorschläge der DAK an die Reigerung." 2. Juli 1953, Stiftungsarchiv Akademie der Künste, hereafter SAdK, ZAA118. Published in *Zwischen Diskussion und Disziplin. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Akademie der Künste (Ost). 1945/50-1993* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste / Henschel Verlag, 1997), 92.

republic."[416] He describes the "malevolent dictatorship of opinion of a small group of functionaries" and details the stories of artists who were forced out of the GDR by those officials and their relentless censure.[417] Together with a similar intervention by Bertolt Brecht, Harich's scathing critique of the Commission put the Party on the defensive. The result was the dissolution of the State Commission for Art in late 1953 and the creation of the Ministry for Culture, with the country's most prominent author and member of the Academy of Arts, Johannes R. Becher, as minister, the equivalent of having an artist "on the inside."[418]

With the loosening of Party controls, cultural policy in the GDR swung through a period of relative liberalization, chiefly between 1955 and 1957. For many visual artists, this meant an increased engagement with western modern art. 1955's *documenta*, for example, attracted many artists, especially of the younger generations, from the east.[419] Art history and criticism opened up somewhat in this period as well. As editor from 1954 to 1957, the artist Herbert Sandberg shifted the emphasis of *bildende kunst*, the GDR's major visual arts journal. Even with Sandberg's open-minded approach, *bildende kunst* remained a partisan publication focused on expanding and strengthening socialist art

[416] Wolfgang Harich, "Es geht um den Realismus – die bildenden Künste und die Kunstkommission," *Berliner Zeitung* 14. July 1953. Reprinted in Schubbe, *Dokumente*, 292-295. The Staatliche Kunstkommission is the same agency as the Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten, which I discuss in Chapter Three.

[417] Among them, Ulrich Knispel, Mart Stam, and Horst Strempel, all committed socialist artists who, having tried unsuccessfully to combine the demands of the Party for style and content, gave up and fled to the west. See Harich, 294.

[418] Brecht's article, "Kulturpolitik und Akademie der Künste," appeared in *Neues Deutschland*, 12. August 1953. See Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus. Die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 63-65.

[419] As I have discussed above and in Chapter Two, archival documents from *documenta* show that the organizers anticipated East German visitors, and that they used their proximity to the East to secure federal funding in 1959. Harald Metzkes drew from his experience of *documenta* in the painting *Evacuation of the Six-Armed Goddess* (1956), which is based in composition, color, and subject matter on Max Beckmann's *Evacuation of the Sphinx* (1945), which Metzkes saw in Kassel. See Karin Thomas, *Kunst in Deutschland seit 1945* (Köln: Dumont, 2002), 90.

production in the GDR. But the journal's content came to reflect a balance between Party-loyal socialist realism, including considerations of Germany's "humanistic heritage" and examples from Soviet art, and considerations of alternative types of realist production. For instance, Sandberg covered West German and other western contemporary art, including the painting of the Italian realists Renato Guttuso and Gabriele Mucchi, the sculpture of Henry Moore, and, most extensively, Pablo Picasso's recent work. From 1955 to 1956 *bildende kunst* was the venue of the so-called "Picasso-debate," a series of essays to which art historians and critics from East and West Germany contributed, as did members of the general public. This important interlude in East German art theory was not limited to the discussion of Picasso per se—the tension between abstract and figurative in his work, or his relative partisanship—rather, as Eckhard Gillen writes, "[t]he name Picasso merely stood for the question of to what extent the artist, as a socialist realist, is permitted to make use of the experimental methods and forms of modernism within the development of a new socialist art."[420]

But by 1956, the pendulum had begun to swing back. In the wake of the Hungarian uprising and demonstrations in other member states of the Soviet bloc, the SED became concerned about relinquishing too much control of cultural production. The Party took steps to make sure that the "revisionism" that had been rampant in Hungary would not spread in the GDR. Wolfgang Harich and scores of other intellectuals were arrested, tried and sentenced for endangering state security. In the same rush to

[420] Eckhard Gillen, *"Schwierigkeiten beim Suchen der Wahrheit." Bernhard Heisig im Konflikt zwischen "verordnetem Antifaschismus" und der Auseinandersetzung mit seinem Kriegstrauma. Eine Studie zur Problematik der antifaschistischen und sozialistischen Kunst der SBZ/DDR 1945-1989* ((Ph.D. Diss., Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2002), 351. The "Picasso debate" is one of the most widely discussed episodes of GDR art history because it epitomizes the "thaw" of 1955-1957. For a concise discussion see Goeschen, 128-130.

consolidate public ideas about art and culture, Herbert Sandberg came under the SED's scrutiny. Sandberg's inclusive editorial method at *bildende kunst* and, in particular, his enthusiastic review of the 1956 Venice Biennale, made him an easy target. In that review he praised recent developments in western art and contrasted this with the exhibition at the Soviet pavilion, a "frightening abundance" which demonstrated "academic master[y], the solidarity of the artists with their new environment, but the absence of new, design-related discoveries."[421] As a result of his repeated espousal of liberal style, but no doubt in large part due to this bold dismissal of current Soviet art, Sandberg was removed from his position in early 1957. He was replaced by Horst Jähner, an art historian whom the culture section of the Central Committee of the SED considered to be safely party-loyal.[422]

Harich's arrest and Sandberg's dismissal were only two examples of the Party's systematic reclaiming of cultural matters in the late 1950s. By the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* in 1958, the slight relaxation of cultural policy and the increased autonomy of artists that had followed the 1953 exhibition had been reversed. At the Fourth Cultural Conference of the SED in October 1957, the SED was represented by Secretary of State in the Ministry for Culture Alexander Abusch, who made clear that "revisionist" tendencies among the intelligentsia would not be tolerated. Abusch and the other speakers reasserted the Party's demand that artists and writers, the creators of socialist culture, spend time with the workers in order to produce art and literature that was

[421] Herbert Sandberg, "Erster Bericht von der 28. Biennale in Venedig" *bildende kunst* 7/1956, 395-396.
[422] "Stellungnahme aus der Abteilung Kultur beim ZK der SED zu der Tätigkeit der Zeitschrift 'Bildende Kunst' under der Redaktion von Herbert Sandberg," 18. March 1957. SAPMO-Barch, ZPA, IV/2/906/171, pp 37-38. Reprinted in Goeschen, 339-340.

relevant to those workers.[423] Time spent in factories and on farms would allow not only observations of the working class in action but also would enable artists and writers to understand socialist life by participating in that labor themselves. As part of their cooperation with factories and farming collectives, artists volunteered time leading informal drawing groups (*Zirkel*) and writers encouraged workers to pick up the pen in factory writing groups. This prescription for socialist cultural production eventually became known as the "Bitterfeld Way" after the first Bitterfeld Writers' Conference in April 1959 at the Bitterfeld Electro-Chemical Combine.[424]

The implications of the SED's 1957 declarations for East Germany's artists were considerable. In effect they announced a single, approved way of producing realist art and moved the Party closer to the cohesive definition of socialist realism that had been lacking earlier in the decade. For the SED, artists' immersion in the life of the working class was a means of producing authenticity. In the reception of the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* in 1958-59, and especially at the German Artists' Conference in the winter of 1959, Party functionaries, journalists, art critics, and artists define "realism" in terms of that close contact between artist and worker. The debates I discuss below reveal a definition of "realistic" art as that which reflects and even anticipates the daily life of socialist Germany. The SED reasoned that a successful connection to reality would arise through artists' committed involvement with factory or farm life and their integration and friendship with workers, and although the Party had been advocating this type of immersion for years, the 1957 Cultural Conference and the first Bitterfeld Conference in

[423] See Eckhard Gillen, *"Schwierigkeiten beim Suchen der Wahrheit,"* 361.
[424] See *Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! Protokoll der Autorenkonferenz des Mitteldeutschen Verlages, Halle (Saale), am 24. April 1959 im Kulturpalast des Elektrochemischen Kombinats Bitterfeld* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1959).

April 1959 affirmed that on-site observation and participation "in the factory" had become official policy.

The *Fourth German Art Exhibition* and the Development of Socialist Realism

The official response to the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* (September 1958-January 1959) indicates that the demands made by Abusch and others in the SED leadership in 1957 had been at least partially implemented a year later. Prominent cultural politicians praised those artists who had accepted the party's challenge to go into the factories and chided those who still refused to accept that this was the only way to produce truly socialist artworks. In the exhibition catalog, Minister of Culture Abusch spells out the major difference between true art in the GDR and that of the capitalist west—and of the revisionist artists in the east who thought they could incorporate abstracted or expressive form into progressive art: "Our new socialist art is indifferent to the hunt for abstract sensations of form that is practiced in the late-bourgeois art of declining capitalist society, where the distinction between sickly fantasizing and snobby posturing is blurred."[425] As in earlier discussions, Abusch explains the necessity of representational art to the socialist cause: "In art which serves humanity, the truth is always representationally concrete – and its design demands the highest equality of content and form that can be achieved."[426] The author asks that the viewer scrutinize the works on exhibit, to see whether "the people of the working class, the decisive designers

[425] Alexander Abusch, untitled essay, *Vierte Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Berlin: Verband bildender Künstler Deutschlands, 1959), X.
[426] Ibid.

of our socialist life and themselves socialism's new image of humanity, have already become the dominant theme of the sculpture and painting which is presented here."[427]

President of the Union of Visual Artists Willi Wolfgramm reiterated Abusch's challenge in his own catalog contribution: "The works will reveal whether the artists were filled in their creative work with the insights and awareness which daily socialist life teaches us."[428] According one major review of the show in the art journal *bildende kunst*, by and large the exhibition met the expectations of these two officials. Obviously the positive reception can be attributed at least in part to the Party loyalty of the magazine; but what I want to point out here is the author's explanation of what makes the work successful as socialist art:

> A large portion of the work of our painters was produced, from the first sketches to the final version, in our state-owned enterprises (*Volkseigene Betriebe*), in constant contact with workers…Many artists have put pen to paper, publishing extensive descriptions in the press about the ways in which they owe their high artistic achievement, which has been recognized in the form of state purchases, to the level-headed critique and helpful hints of simple workers.[429]

For this reviewer, it is direct exposure to working-class life and the intervention of workers in the composition process that ensures the socialist realist character of the new art displayed in Dresden. This theme arises repeatedly in discussions of contemporary art at the end of the decade, and although it is by no means a new idea at this time, the increased frequency with which it appears is probably due to changes in policy introduced at the cultural conference of the SED in 1957.[430]

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[427] Ibid., XII.
[428] Willi Wolfgramm, untitled essay, *Vierte Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Berlin: Verband bildender Künstler Deutschlands, 1959), XVI.
[429] Georg Kaufmann, "Die Vierte Deutsche Kunstausstellung – Ein Bekenntnis zur sozialistischen Weltanschauung." *Bildende Kunst* 1958/11, 715.
[430] In his internal review of the show, Martin Läuter emphasizes the importance of the Party's Cultural Conference for the 1958 exhibition, stating that those responsible for planning the show were

Many of the works exhibited at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* offered interpretations of the industrial and agricultural landscapes of the GDR. The painting at the top of the visitors' survey conducted by the show's organizers was a large-scale landscape, Bernhard Kretzschmar's *Blick auf Stalinstadt* (*View Over Stalinstadt*) [Fig. 4.14][431] The city of Stalinstadt was founded in 1950 as a planned industrial housing development for workers at the Ironworks Combine East (*Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost*).[432] The city represented the growth of socialist production methods and the related improvement in the standard of living in the GDR and as such was an ideal subject for a socialist landscape painting.[433] Reproduced in multiple retrospective volumes of GDR art, Kretzschmar's picture was a highly promoted image in the late 1950s, no doubt because of his approach to the subject. Kretzschmars composition is divided into approximate halves by a road that cuts into it from the lower left. The two halves are characterized by signs of industry on the left and signs of habitation on the right. The artist emphasizes productivity by depicting smoke pouring out of the chimneys and situating a partially-completed apartment building in the center of the picture. He balances these references to productivity with a few small figures of day trippers on bicycles. These figures provide staffage in the foreground and also perhaps hint at the leisure time that efficient production guarantees. In a review of landscape paintings at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*, Ulrich Kuhirt writes that Kretzschmar's work is an "outstanding painting,

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overwhelmingly skeptical that the show could come together on time; after the conference, he reports, there was "an increase in activity, a gathering of forces, and an intensification of artistic work." "Abwicklung der Vierten Deutschen Kunstausstellung," 13. März 1960 in SAdK-VbKD 32/2.

[431] 105 x 160 cm (41 x 63 inches).

[432] The development became its own town and separated from the village of Fürstenberg in 1953, when it was renamed Eisenhüttenstadt ("Ironworks-City") as a consequence of de-Stalinization. See *Aufbau West, Aufbau Ost. Die Planstädte Wolfsburg und Eisenhüttenstadt in der Nachkriegszeit*. Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1997).

[433] Ibid.

certainly the best in the show" in which "the new socialist-humanist content of the landscape, which is the true object of our landscape painting, has been formed in an artistically masterful way." Kuhirt argues that the painting signaled "a new level of achievement in landscape painting which has set a standard for all subsequent work in this genre."

For Kuhirt, landscape's potential as a socialist realist topic lies in the details of new industrial construction: "No wonder, as a result of the new task at hand and the new conditions of the artist's relationship to his environment, that so-called industry landscapes, landscapes with the theme of socialist structure (*Aufbau*), dominated the exhibition."[434] By focusing on contemporary developments in the GDR, Kuhirt maintains, artists like Kretzschmar "organically incorporate the accomplishments of the bourgeois landscape painting of the nineteenth century into socialist art" through the artists' ability to "see the landscape with the eyes of a collective owner and shape them in such a way that the viewer is included in [the ownership of these] natural riches. Thus the representation is raised from the private sphere to a societal level."[435]

Kretzschmar's *View Over Stalinstadt* and other successes at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* described by Kuhirt and others in *bildende kunst* were only partially acknowledged by the SED leadership. An interview with Party Secretary Walter Ulbricht in the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* published in early October 1958 elaborated the Party's official viewpoint on the exhibition and on contemporary art for the general public; when the interview was subsequently reprinted in a special pull-out flyer in the

[434] Ulrich Kuhirt, "Die neue Qualität unserer Landschaftsmalerei," *bildende kunst* 1/1959, 13. Kuhirt's review came several months after the show closed, and it seems possible, though not likely, that Kuhirt's interest in the painting was a result of the positive reception it received from the general public (as reported in Läuter's assessment).
[435] Ulrich Kuhirt, "Die neue Qualität unserer Landschaftsmalerei," 17.

November issue of *bildende kunst*, artists had a second opportunity to study the Secretary's recommendations. In the course of the interview, Ulbricht recognizes a partial improvement over the works in the 1953 *Third German Art Exhibition*. He sees this primarily in the increased use of color among the exhibited paintings, evidence "that the artists have learned, more than was the case previously, to see our life with the eyes of a life-affirming, progressive person of our times." In this respect, Ulbricht mentions Walter Womacka's painting *Rast bei der Ernte* (*Rest During Harvest*), which I discuss below; this is the only work that the Secretary names in the entire interview. And overall, Ulbricht's compliments are few. He registers disappointment with the exhibition, which lacks "truly masterful works of…popular appeal," that is, "pictures that will be seen by thousands of visitors to our Houses of Culture, club rooms, and other public buildings and experienced to be 'their' artworks."[436] Rather than citing examples of good or bad work in the exhibition, Ulbricht concentrates on the steps needed to ensure that the small improvements are joined by more far-reaching progress. He does so by quoting from his own speech at the fifth Party Congress of the SED in July 1958: "The willingness [among artists] to develop a common language with the increasing number of working people who wish to…beautify their lives with works of visual art is slowly growing. Through cooperative agreements (*Freundschaftsverträge)* and study assignments the leadership of our people's factories should help our artists to evolve more quickly towards the art of socialist realism…."[437] Here Ulbricht reemphasizes the necessity of placing artists in factories and on farms, where they can experience working life firsthand and, thus, be prepared to produce more authentic, *volkstümlich* (folksy or popular) art. For Ulbricht

[436] "Zur IV. deutschen Kunstausstellung," *Neues Deutschland*, 4. October 1958: 3.
[437] Ibid.

and the rest of the Party, only that integration can guarantee the development of socialist realist art.

Ulbricht's interview was as good as an official statement from the Party. His dissatisfaction with the show is a warning couched in encouraging language, and it leaves little doubt that those artists who do not participate in the manner demanded by the Party will find themselves passed over for commissions and unable to work. As the prominence of the Ulbricht interview suggests, the SED considered the various failures of the 1958-59 show to be serious enough to warrant an extended investigation into the exhibition's planning and organization. In an internal assessment of the show, Martin Läuter, the organizational coordinator of both the 1953 and 1958 Dresden exhibitions, attempts to determine what had gone wrong and where the fault lay in this repeated shortfall of the production of socialist realism. Läuter lists the possible causes for the show's lack of resonance amongst the general public:

> The results of the district juries in June and July of 1958 that were presented in Dresden included works that surpassed all expectations. After the jurying, it was a foregone conclusion that the basis of a new socialist art had been achieved. But after the [exhibition's] opening it became clear that general societal developments had already advanced so far that the visual arts, despite undeniable progress, could not be considered fully valid reflections of our socialist reality.[438]

Läuter offers numerous other reasons that the exhibition was only able to attract half the number of visitors the 1953 show had. Apart from simply not being on the same page with its public, he writes, the exhibition suffered from a lack of cooperation between the Academy of Arts and the Union of Visual Artists, who were unable to agree on specific duties.[439] The latter was, in Läuter's eyes, proof that the GDR's artists were unable or

[438] Martin Läuter, "Abwicklung der Vierten Deutschen Kunstausstellung."
[439] Läuter blames the lack of cooperation on revisionist tendencies, primarily among the members of the Academy of Arts, who he claims continually thwarted any attempts to get a committee off the ground. See

unwilling to work in the interest of a cohesive socialist realist production; they had shirked the responsibility the Party given them.

The Congress of the Union of Visual Artists

Discussions at the Fourth Congress of the Union of Visual Artists in December 1959, one year after the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*, continued to focus on the achievements and failures of the 1958-59 show.[440] Union of Visual Artists president Wolfgramm does just this in a lengthy explanation of the role of the artist in the scheme of the SED's recently adopted 7-Year Plan, which he says both requires that artists become more fully enmeshed in the life of the worker, but also gives artists the tools to accomplish this. He stresses that one of the main duties of the visual artist in the scheme of the Seven Year Plan is to "create artworks in which the revolutionary transformations of the present are fully embodied. This demands that our artists completely reorient their lives. To represent the problems of the present means to observe the life of the people not from a distance, but to live together with the working class and with the people." As a support for this statement, Wolfgramm quotes Ulbricht's earlier assertion that the artist must live the life of the worker, that "it is no longer sufficient to 'visit' the workers" and that the resulting artwork must be "accepted by the working class as its own concern, as

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Läuter, "Einschätzung der Vierten Deutschen Kunstausstellung Dresden 1958," SAdK, VBK-Archiv, Dresdner Ausstellungen 32/2.

[440] Because this is a published transcript of the talks that were given at the conference rather than the original transcript, it is possible that the essays were edited in such a way as to present a cohesive, pro-SED voice. It is also possible that the workers who spoke were given prepared speeches to read that had little or nothing to do with their own opinions. But I do not think that the Congress itself was completely orchestrated, nor that the talks that were published in the procedings were bogus. Several of the contributions by artists remain critical of the Party's methods and the official understanding of the role of formal innovation in creating socialist art. This is remarkable given calls at the same time by Party functionaries for the "self-criticism" of those artists. Overall, I feel that the conference provides a fairly accurate picture of the both the reigning-in of revisionism and the lingering attempts by liberal artists to keep a discussion of style open and ongoing.

its own art." Wolfgramm uses the arguments Ulbricht made in his now paradigmatic interview and insists that authentically socialist realist art can only be produced through the artist's proximity to her subject: "In close cohabitation with the workers of industry and agriculture, especially in the socialist workers brigades, the artist can be transformed into a new, socialist person."[441]

In the course of this discussion, Wolfgramm names several painters whose work demonstrates the benefits of a close cooperation between painter and worker; as Ulbricht had done in his interview, Wolfgramm lists Walter Womacka among those artists. Although Wolfgramm does not provide a description of Womacka's work and its specific, realist qualities, I feel it is useful at this point to consider a work by the painter, as well as one by Karl-Heinz Wenzel, whom Wolfgramm also praises, in order to understand the form and content that functionaries like Ulbricht and Wolfgramm sought when they scrutinized the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*. As in Kretzschmar's *View of Stalinstadt*, landscape figures prominently in the paintings of both Womack and Wenzel, who depicted life and work on the GDR's communal farms. Womacka's *Rast Während der Ernte* (*Rest During Harvest*) [Fig. 4.15], Walter Ulbricht's single example of a painting sensitive to socialist principles, depicts a group of young women and two men picnicking against a backdrop of fields of corn ready for harvest. The figures are gathered into a circle, which the viewer sees from a slightly elevated viewpoint, an orientation that includes the viewer in the scene by suggesting that she has walked up on the seated group. One female figure gazes out of the picture, emphasizing this interaction with the observer. Womacka pictures the women in simple smocks with kerchiefs covering their

[441] Willi Wolfgramm, "Der Siebenjahrplan und die bildende Kunst," *Vierter Kongress des Verbandes bildender Künstler Deutschlands* (Berlin: Verband bildender Künstler Deutschlands, 1959), 31-33.

hair and the men in simple work clothes; one of the male figures is shown wearing a cap with goggles, implying that he is the driver of an unseen tractor. Karl-Heinz Wenzel's *Moderne Rübenpflege* (*Modern Beet Cultivation*) [Fig. 4.16] has a similar subject (and similarly-dressed figures). Rather than the peaceful respite evoked in Womacka's painting, Wenzel depicts farm laborers in the midst of tending the fields, with a tractor pulling a trailer of women who sit stooped over, weeding or harvesting a crop. Next to the tractor, Wenzel positions a second group of women using hoes to work the field; this creates a contrast between old and new methods of farming. The figures in Wenzel's painting wear the same plain utilitarian clothing as those in Womacka's picture.[442]

With these two works, Womacka and Wenzel address the requirements for socialist realism propounded by the SED at the time. Both artists detail everyday life in the GDR and focus in particular on the various facets of the workday, including moments of relaxation and innovations in production. The similarity of the clothing, especially that of the female figures, within the paintings keeps their occupation recognizable. In the artists' rigid interpretation of the Party's notion of "the typical," the figures in Womacka's *Rest During Harvest* [see Fig. 4.15] are similar in physique, facial expressions, and clothing. In contrast, Wenzel depicts only one full face in his *Modern Beet Cultivation* [see Fig. 4.16] and leaves the faces of the other figures mostly obscured by their placement in the composition. The result is an emphasis on the group nature of

[442] Wenzel's work *Modern Beet Cultivation* appeared at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* and was reproduced in the catalog; it was also included in the exhibition *Tied to Our New Life: Ten Years of Visual Arts in the German Democratic Republic* in 1959 and was pictured in the catalog. According to a partial survey conducted at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*, Womacka's *Girl with Bouquet* was one of the top twenty best-liked pictures, allbeit towards the bottom of the list; his *Rest During Harvest,* a more topically socialist picture, was not mentioned. See Läuter, "Einschätzung der Vierten Deutschen Kunstausstellung Dresden 1958." The survey was incomplete in the sense that very few were turned in; at the time of Läuter's first assessment of the exhibition only 133 of the 1200 questionnaires passed out had been received by the organizers.

the job at hand. The women Wenzel portrays here are working as part of a collective, not as individuals, and he underlines this with a strong horizontal arrangement of their similarly positioned bodies and a repetitive, schematized treatment of their faces.

Womacka's success at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* presaged his future achievements; over the course of the 1960s he managed to address the demands of the Party as well as appeal to the general public. His *Paar am Strand* (*Couple on the Beach*) [Fig. 4.17] is famous for being the most widely-owned reproduction in the GDR.[443] In later decades, Womacka's work decorated public buildings throughout the GDR, most notably the House of Teachers on Alexanderplatz in Berlin, where his mosaic frieze has recently been restored. Womacka serves as a counterpoint to the other giants of GDR art, Willi Sitte, Bernhard Heisig, Werner Tübke, and Wolfgang Mattheuer, all of whom were also establishing their careers in the late 1950s. These four artists, unlike Womacka, had difficulty adapting their production to the SED's requirements for socialist realism; all four had works on paper in the 1958-59 show, but their paintings were rejected because of lingering formal experimentation. Sitte and Heisig, in particular, were targets of substantial criticism from 1956 to 1959.[444]

At the Union of Visual Artists' Congress, Womacka played the role of the committed socialist artist. In his contribution, he first indicates his awareness of the concerns of his fellow artists by addressing their most commonly-raised objections against "going into the factories." These include complaints that immersion in factory life

[443] See Bernd Lindner, *Verstellter offener Blick. Eine Rezeptionsgeschichte bildender Kunst im Osten Deutschlands 1945-1995* (Köln: Böhlau, 1998).
[444] There is a substantial body of work on these four artists, especially on Sitte and Heisig. See most recently Eckhard Gillen's dissertation on Heisig and Gisela Schirmer's book *Willi Sitte. Farben und Folgen* (Leipzig: Faber und Faber, 2003).

will produce only *Betriebsbilder* ("factory pictures"),[445] and that humoring the demands of the workers will result in naturalism, causing what his colleagues fear will be "the death of art!" Womacka lastly cites the recent calls of "revisionist" artists like Herbert Sandberg that East German artists look to the progressive figurative art of West Germany for formal or stylistic inspiration. This, he says, is proposed by artists who believe that because the art of the GDR has a new type of content, it requires a new form, and that new West German figuration is closer to the art of the East Germans than the Soviet model promoted by the SED.[446] Womacka then forcefully refutes all of these arguments. He counters them with the party line: joint participation among artists in the life of the factories will help the artists of the GDR see the truth, that the life of the worker and the model of Soviet art are the best guides for socialist artistic production in the GDR. At the same time, he also emphasizes that what is appropriate for the Soviets is not necessarily appropriate for the Germans. Discussing a critic's complaint that his most recent work was not as colorful as *Rest During Harvest*, Womacka points out that one type of coloration, like other aspects of form and composition, is not always appropriate for all work. While it may seem meek in comparison to the protests of artists aired at the Congress following the previous exhibition in 1953, at which far-reaching criticism was leveled at the government, the Party, and the art critics of the GDR, Womacka's last statements allow him to end by reaffirming that the final say in matters of artistic production rests with the artist.

Where Womacka seems to position himself between the functionaries and the artists at the Congress, the painter Heinrich Witz lays a more specific claim to the Party's

[445] such as those used in the advertisements in the *Eisen und Stahl* catalog
[446] Walter Womacka, *Farbe Bekennen. Erinnerungen eines Malers* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2004), 109-110.

program of immersion in working class life in his Congress presentation.[447] At the time, Witz was living and working with the miners of the Soviet-German Corporation Wismut (SDAG Wismut), the GDR's most important uranium mine.[448] His painting *Der neue Anfang* (*The New Beginning*) [Fig. 4.18], shown at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*, recorded a festive dinner held in honor of his brigade and another entering into a "pact of socialist comradeship" (that is, a non-competition agreement).[449] Eckhard Gillen has interpreted the central focus of the painting, the clasped hands of two members of the brigades, as a reference to the handshake that represented the integration of the Social Democratic Party and the German Communist Party to form the SED in 1946, and which became the party logo for the SED.[450] The horizontal organization of the majority of the figures in the painting, along with the single figure of the woman in the foreground, situate the viewer in front of the action, a compositional choice that allows Witz to suggest the inclusion of the viewer in the celebration of this act of friendship. But the comraderie implied this opening up of the picture is hindered by the rest of Witz's representation. Together the relative stiffness of the figures, their similar facial expressions, and the overall lack of movement limit the painting's emotional impact and eclipse the celebratory nature of the subject. The picture seems more mechanical than

[447] Earlier in 1959 Witz had recently become head of Leipzig's regional section of the Union of Visual Artists, a position he took over from Bernhard Heisig when the latter's views on style became too liberal for the Union leadership. At the Union of Visual Artists' Congress he was the first speaker after the general introductions and president Wolfgramm's talk, and the prominence of this position is indicative, I would argue, of the importance the Party members within the Artist's Union placed on Witz's perspective. Witz's speech chronicles the lack of cohesion among the artists at Leipzig's academy in 1956 and 1957, when formal experimentation was common and many of the school's faculty were dissatisfied with the state of socialist art and the Party's notions of realism. See Gillen, *"Schwierigkeiten beim Suchen der Wahrheit,"* 96.

[448] "Offizielle Internetseite des vom Bund finanzierten Bergbau-Sanierungsunternehmens Wismut GmbH," http://www.wismut.de (accessed 20. August.2005).

[449] Günter Hoffmann, untitled talk, *Vierter Kongress des Verbandes bildender Künstler Deutschlands* (Berlin: Verband bildender Künstler Deutschlands, 1959) 66-67.

[450] See Gillen, *"Schwierigkeiten beim Suchen der Wahrheit,"* 96.

joyful, as though the cooperation of these two parties is not spontaneous, but orchestrated. At the same time, Witz's restrained, even bland, treatment generalizes the content, so that while it records a specific event it could also function as a metaphorical image of socialist cooperation.

In terms of the creation of a socialist realist picture, however, Witz's own presence at the event, which is symbolically indicated in the large empty space in the left foreground of the painting, was more important than these other formal choices. Witz's embeddedness among the miners resulted in what his comrades at the mine saw as an authentic picture. This is indicated in a report presented to the Union of Visual Artists' Executive Board by the cultural representative of the SDAG Wismut section of the SED: "That night, for the first time at Wismut, an agreement was reached by two brigades on the basis of which the one brigadier would help the other by sharing his experiences. The artist, who sat in the midst of this brigade—and was hardly noticed at first—recorded this moment. We stand behind this picture in every respect because a historical situation at Wismut is captured in it."[451] The artist's day-to-day exposure to the life of the miners, including this formal occasion, guaranteed the realism of the painting.[452]

At the 1959 Congress, a decorated national Hero of Labor and the head of Witz's brigade at Wismut, Günter Hoffmann, provided the workers' view of their cooperation with Witz: "We wrestled with the problems of the picture *The New Beginning* together, because we most definitely did not agree with everything right away. The painter and we learned a great deal in our discussions about this painting…the connection that the artist

[451] SAdK, VBK-ZV 80 p. 126.
[452] The case of Heinrich Witz is described by Eckhard Gillen in detail. Although *The New Beginning* was praised publically in 1959 by the miners he depicted and by some cultural functionaries, Witz ran into trouble shortly thereafter when his static approach to figures and composition was said to limit the evocative potential of the paintings. See Gillen, *"Schwierigkeiten beim Suchen der Wahrheit,"* 96-100.

Heinrich Witz established with us was very important for everyone involved."[453] Hoffmann's actual description of the miners' impressions of Witz and his work are brief, but his remarks on the general importance of this type of collaboration are more extensive: "If the artists properly discuss everything with the workers, they'll also really come to know all aspects of our life. We want our artists to produce works of art that help us in our struggle to become socialist people….We have to further secure these new relationships between artist and worker, and I would even say that without this consolidation no new, socialist art will emerge."[454]

Hoffmann's reiteration of the SED's thesis that realist pictures evolve only through close cooperation between the artist and the worker or farmer was strengthened at the congress by its repetition by both artists and workers. Like the reviews of the *Fourth German Art Exhibition*, such contributions to the artists' conference indicate that by 1959 the SED was working to shore up artistic production and to put into place a firmer formal standard for socialist realism. Although such guidelines remained ill-defined, Party members from Ulbricht to Womacka to Witz were unwavering in their demand for and belief in a consolidated method for creating socialist realist pictures, one that eclipsed the relative openness that had followed the *Third German Art Exhibition* in 1953. Wolfgramm's exhortation that the artist learn "to live together with the working class and with the people"[455] echoed Ulbricht's insistence a year earlier that "cooperative agreements and study assignments the leadership of our people's factories should help our artists to evolve more quickly towards the art of socialist realism."[456] In this scheme,

[453] Hoffmann, untitled talk, 67.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Wolfgramm, "Der Siebenjahrplan und die bildende Kunst," 33.
[456] "Zur IV. deutschen Kunstausstellung," 3.

a specific reality, that is, the daily life of East Germany's workers, was determined objectively and could be depicted by artists who immersed themselves in that life.

CONCLUSIONS

What becomes clear from the examples of *documenta II* and the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* is that production and interpretation of contemporary art in divided Germany remained unresolved at the end of the decade. In West Germany there was still dissent over the dominance of abstraction, at least in its most radical (and pervasive) forms. East German artists continued to be unwilling or unable to fully realize the implications of the Party's understanding of socialist realism. But if difficulties remained in establishing what East and West German art were, these difficulties were offset by an ever more successful definition of what they were not. For example, the SED systematically prevented figures like Herbert Sandberg from promoting the potential of West German art as a means of expanding socialist realism's visual vocabulary, returning to arguments of decadence that they had used for ten years; meanwhile, Werner Haftmann composed a scheme for modern art in which socialist realism stands as the "other" of total abstraction. The contrasts that critics, artists, and political figures had begun using in the early 1950s continued to be vital ideological tools for both sides.

The most striking of these oppositions lies in the Germans' definitions of reality and realism. East German figures, most prominently Walter Ulbricht, promoted an apparently objective reality, one which could be found in the socialist lives of workers and farmers. Western figures like Haftmann and the editors of *Das Kunstwerk* endorsed interpretations of contemporary reality that were predicated on its subjective apprehension by the individual; these ideas were in turn validated by the state, for

example, by the federal government's financial support for *documenta II*. Thus one determining factor of East and West German definitions of reality, including its nature and its appropriate representation in art, remained the contrast of the two definitions to one another. The opposition of an objective and a subjective reality allowed the proponents of each to mask their respective schemes' internal weaknesses, but only to a certain extent.

In these contexts, "reality" is a concept that roughly overlaps with the idea of "the present." At the end of the decade, then, the present becomes more vital than historical legacies or the past in shaping the interpretation of contemporary art. For example, Ulbricht's dissatisfaction with the art shown at the *Fourth German Art Exhibition* was due to artists' refusal to recognize the "reality" of socialist life, that is, their own present. Similarly, although Haftmann needed the past to validate his description of contemporary art, critics of *documenta II* felt that by excluding figurative art, he and his colleagues had provided only a partial description of the present. In both of these cases, a group with exclusive power (the East German SED) or one in a privileged position (West German advocates of total abstraction) asserted a dominant idea of reality. Both ideas were met with resistance, whether from the East German artists who continued to pursue their own notion of socialist realism, or from the West Germans who protested against the "management" of modern art. In effect, those dissenting voices opposed a single resolution of the past as it was implicit in the two dominant understandings of the German present.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have demonstrated that painting, its exhibition, and its interpretation were crucial in shaping postwar Germany. Public debates about art provided a means for East and West Germans to determine how best to make use of Germany's past and to create and refine acceptable histories that, in turn, helped to define the new cultures of the two postwar states. At the exhibitions I have examined above, as well as in the discussions those exhibitions provoked, past and present were nearly inseparable. The legacy of National Socialist representation posed a particular problem for those Germans who sought to move forward and to assert East and West Germany in the postwar international community. But as I have shown, positive sources and models were available as well. These included the art and ideals of the original Künstlerbund; the international fame of the German Expressionists; the patronage of early twentieth-century industry; and the revolutionary work of Soviet artists. In describing the ways in which Germans called upon these older models to bolster their own efforts, I have argued that the histories my subjects composed were deeply connected to the present they sought to promote.

My methodology offers significant insight not just into the historical moment of the 1950s, but also into the political and cultural situation of Germany today. Nearly two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of the two German states, the goals and strategies I have examined above remain relevant as the past continues to define the present in Germany. Recent exhibitions of postwar art still offer new narrations of Germany's past. At these shows and in their reception, museum professionals,

collectors, artists, politicians, and other commentators seek to interpret the legacies of the twentieth century in the interest of defining the present. The most striking recent examples of this continuing public discussion have been the numerous exhibitions of GDR art of the past decade and the controversy surrounding the installation of the Friedrich Christian Flick Collection of contemporary art at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. As focal points for public discussion of the new understandings of Germany's past and emerging definitions of the now-unified German nation promoted by their organizers, these exhibitions prove that art remains a crucial force in defining post-unification Germany.

THE VALUE OF EAST GERMAN ART

Since 1990, exhibitions of East German art have come to function as more than artistic surveys. Because they feature the art of a now-defunct state, such exhibitions inevitably function as interpretative structures through which participants analyze the legacy not just of East German artistic production, but of the GDR as a whole. The first major public assessment of East German art after unification was part of the exhibition *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* (Rise and Fall of the Modern, Weimar, 1999). This high-profile exhibition was comprised of three separate installments: the first was a survey of modern German art of the early twentieth century. The second was a survey of National Socialist art, *Die Kunst dem Volke - erworben: Adolf Hitler* (Art for the People - Acquired by Adolf Hitler), and the third a survey of East German art, *Offiziell und inoffiziell – Die Kunst der DDR* (Official and Unofficial – The Art of the GDR). The first part of *Rise and Fall of the Modern* ran independently of the latter two installments, which opened simultaneously after the first had closed. *Art for the People* and *Official*

and Unofficial, while installed in separate buildings, resembled one another in terms of their physical layout and the overall characterization of the art shown in each. The organizers installed the Nazi art in a space evocative of a storage depot, made up of several large, unfinished rooms with concrete floors and bare fluorescent light bulbs. Within this stark environment the paintings leaned on shelves and against walls, an installation strategy that effectively minimized the paintings' value as works of art. It further eliminated any collective message the works might have communicated had they hung at eye level with sufficient space separating each work and been lit with conventional exhibition lighting.

In a similar way, the organizers arranged the East German art in *Official and Unofficial* so that there was very little differentiation in terms of the works' dates or genres, and with little regard for their relative quality. 500 paintings hung one above the other in a vast circular hall called the "Panorama Room;" the uppermost works were far from the viewer and lacked adequate lighting. Further deemphasizing the value of the works hanging in this vast space was a small box-like construction at one end of the large hall. The interior of this small space was white, mimicking the walls of a gallery. It contained a small number of paintings and drawings by East German artists who had left the GDR and been successful in the west. The abrupt spatial distinction between the works hanging in the Panorama Room and those sequestered in the small white box devalued the majority of East German artistic production, suggesting that only those artists who had left the country had been capable of creating valid and lasting works of art. The remainder of East German art was relegated by the organizers to the category of *Staatskunst*, or state art.

The organizers' display strategies in *Art for the People* and *Official and Unofficial*, as well as the two shows' physical proximity to one another in the city center of Weimar, linked the painting and sculpture of the Nazi period and that of the GDR. The installations of these two bodies of work treated both as if they were valuable only as historical evidence, rather than as works of art. At the same time, the deliberately unsophisticated organization of these installations suggested that the organizers sought to disrupt any potential dialogue among the works within each show, as if together those objects might refer too closely to the historical periods to which they belong. Importantly, the organizers' parallel treatment of the art of National Socialism and that of the GDR also implied an equivalency between those two German states, effectively characterizing the GDR as a violent dictatorship similar to Nazi Germany. By extension, this comparison also declared that East German art was at best devoid of aesthetic value and, at worst, that it was the expression of a dictatorial regime. Many observers attributed the resulting ahistorical association of Nazi art and East German art to the cultural bias of the show's curator, Achim Preiß, an architectural historian born, raised, and educated in West Germany. For these critics, Preiß embodied the attitude of the "Besserwessi," a western know-it-all who misinterpreted and devalued a cultural history he knew nothing about.[457]

Although *Rise and Fall of the Modern* produced a heated public debate around the interpretation and appraisal of East German art, it was several years before there was an institutional response to the Weimar show. In 2003, the National Gallery in Berlin hosted *Kunst in der DDR* (Art in the GDR), a survey with the goal of presenting "art made by artists of differing sensibilities, in and in spite of the historical and social space of the

[457] The extensive press debate of the Weimar exhibitions is chronicled in Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar, *Der Weimarer Bilderstreit. Szenen einer Ausstellung. Eine Dokumentation* (Weimar: VDG, 2000).

'GDR.'"[458] The curators, two former East Germans who had been active in Berlin's museums before unification, sought to counteract the Weimar exhibition's generalizing characterization of GDR art while emphasizing that a "polarization of state-commissioned and 'free' art would be untenable because the two were constantly and implicitly intertwined."[459] The curators' attempt at a new, differentiated reading of East German art took into account the specific historical developments of the GDR artworld, a method which appeared to contrast sharply with the Weimar curators' approach.

But the strategies of *Art in the GDR's* organizers also separated the show from the wave of *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia for East Germany, that happened to surge during the show's run. *Ostalgie* is a manifestation of selective memories of the GDR, its social structures and institutions, and especially of its popular and material culture. Significantly, in spite of its embeddedness in East German culture, *Ostalgie* is not limited to former East Germans. Instead it is often been fueled by West Germans who had little direct connection to the GDR and who celebrate it as a quaint or campy moment in German history, one far removed from their own western experience.[460] When *Art in the GDR* opened in 2003, television specials celebrated the lighter side of East German culture and *Goodbye Lenin* took European movie theatres by storm. Against the backdrop of the popular and largely superficial histories of the GDR that appeared in the concurrent wave of *Ostalgie*, *Art in the GDR* represented a rigorous public effort by former East Germans to narrate their own past by composing an art history of the GDR, and thereby to lay claim to a sovereign cultural history of East Germany.

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[458] Eugen Blume and Roland März, "Re-Vision Kunst. Denkmäler und Sinnzeichen," in Fritz Jacobi, ed., *Kunst in der DDR. Katalog der Gemälde und Skulpturen* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie 2003), 31.
[459] Ibid.
[460] See Martin Blum, "Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgie, Identity, and Material Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 34 no. 3, Winter, 229–253.

THE SHADOW OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

The case of the Flick collection offers a very different example of the ways in which Germans have used art to interpret the national past in the service of forming a positive, forward-looking present. In 2004, Friedrich Christian "Mick" Flick announced his intention to loan his collection of international contemporary art to the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, the state museums of Berlin. This was good news for Berlin, which had no notable collection of recent art. But the gesture drew criticism because of the history of the Flick family: Mick Flick's grandfather, Friedrich Flick, was a major arms supplier to the National Socialist government. The younger Flick's art collection, one of the largest representative collections of contemporary art in the world, was thus a problematic gift. Critics protested that the fortune that had made the collection possible had been accrued through the elder Flick's collaboration with the Nazis, especially through his extensive exploitation of inmates from concentration camps as a source of slave labor during World War II. Friedrich Flick was tried by the occupational government in 1947. He was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison for his aid to and profit from the National Socialist government. Upon his pardon and release in 1950, Flick reentered the West German corporate sphere and rebuilt his fortune with remarkable speed, becoming West Germany's wealthiest man, and one of the wealthiest in the world, by his death in 1972.[461] In spite of this recovery, the elder Flick refused to pay reparations to the families of the slave laborers who had fueled his enterprises during the war.

[461] Jonathan Wiesen, *West German Industry and the Challenge of the Nazi Past, 1945-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 152.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, critics of West German industry came to associate the rehabilitation of Friedrich Flick with the failure of denazification to produce any real break with the past in postwar Germany.[462] Today, Mick Flick's gift bears these same associations, and was further complicated by the younger Flick's continued refusal, as the descendant and heir of a convicted war criminal, to contribute to Germany's national slave labor reparations fund. Other members of the Flick family, including Dagmar Ottmann, the collector's sister and a vocal critic of the Berlin museums' acceptance of the collection, have paid into the reparations fund.[463] Mick Flick instead created his own foundation for the prevention of racism and xenophobia in the former East Germany, stressing thereby that his concern with these growing problems stems from personal conviction rather than from some inherited family guilt.[464]

Critics, notably Ottmann, have asserted that the Flick has used both his collection and his Foundation as tactical maneuvers to distract from the problematic history of the Flick family fortune, rather than engaging in a critical investigation of the details and extent of the Flick business's wartime activity. This same suspicion of Flick's motives led the city of Zurich to refuse to accept an similar offer of a long-term loan of the Flick Collection in 1997.[465] Shortly after Flick failed to secure that earlier donation he established his foundation, leading to accusations that the foundation was simply

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[462] Ibid., 241.
[463] Ottmann published an open letter in response to the public interest in the Flick Collection, criticizing in particular the characterization of the collection as a means of reconciling the past. *Die Zeit* 5. August 2004.
[464] The F.C. Flick-Stiftung gegen Fremdenfeindlichkeit, Rassismus und Intoleranz was established in 2001 to "promote international understanding and thereby to combat rightwing extremism, intolerance, and xenophobia and youth violence in Germany." http://www.stiftung-toleranz.de; see also *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9. January 3003 http://www.faz.net/s/RubEBED639C476B407798B1CE808F1F6632/Doc~EAF80740677454DFA8A56165FD0E4FF3B~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html (8. April 2006).
[465] Steffen Haug, "Die Presse-Kontroverse um die Flick-Collection," H-ArtHist, 14. December 2004 http://www.arthist.net/Docs/Expo19.html (8. April 2006).

designed to soften the family's reputation.[466] A representative from the American Jewish Committee argued that Flick had "had thirty years to show that he had a social conscience, that he was concerned about some effort of reconciliation" and that "a fund to fight right-wing extremism, which is in itself a good thing, is a direct way of confronting responsibility for the past."[467]

Whatever Flick's motives for lending his collection to Berlin, the works of art in the collection have taken on a meaning beyond their value as representative examples of late twentieth-century art. Together they carry the possibility of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, that is, of confronting or mastering the past in the service of moving forward. This phenomena has been extensively analyzed by historians of postwar Germany as the definitive project of the postwar period; it has determined Germany's public and private identities since 1945.[468] Much like the exhibitions and public debates of the early postwar period I have described in this dissertation, both the Flick controversy and the curatorial response of the organizers of *Art in the GDR* demonstrate the ongoing potential of art exhibitions to produce public dialogue in the service of interpreting the past and generating a functional present. These are not merely formal similarities. Instead, now as in the 1950s, there is much at stake in the plural histories that the participants in these debates have created. In recent exhibitions of the art of the GDR, what is ultimately at issue is the legitimacy of the shared, lived experience of the former

[466] As a result, Ottmann and Flick's brother Gert-Rudolf insisted that the collection be named for their brother specifically, and not simply for the Flick family, in order to differentiate themselves from their brother's project. *Artnet Magazine* 20. September 2004 http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/weidle/weidle9-20-04.asp (8. April 2006).
[467] Deirdre Berger in BBC News Online, 23 September, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3680302.stm (8. April 2006).
[468] Jeffrey Herf provides a brief survey of the literature and a critical examination of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies* (Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1997), 8.

East Germans. *Art in the GDR* served to define a community by identifying and preserving values just as much as it established a lineage of East German art history outside of state art. The concerns raised by the Flick case are different, calling attention instead to the ongoing problem of determining who is responsible for Nazi-era crimes. Mick Flick's attitude towards his family's legacy suggests that there are types or degrees of responsibility, while the public response to his position has indicated that the Germans (and the international community) do not agree on the actions that are sufficient to meet that responsibility.

My studies of the 1950s offer insight into these and other recent attempts by Germans to make useable national histories. The examples of the Künstlerbund, the exhibition *Iron and Steel*, *documenta*, and the *Third German Art Exhibition* demonstrate the extent to which the legacy of National Socialism influenced early efforts by German artists, curators, politicians and critics to promote new art in the postwar German states. As I have shown in my discussion of those examples, the legacy of Nazism remained unresolved in the 1950s. Over the course of the past fifty years, that unresolved legacy has become increasingly complex, complicating current examinations of guilt and responsibility, as the Flick case indicates. My study of the development of early East German art at the 1953 and 1959 *German Art Exhibitions*, meanwhile, illuminates the tensions involved in establishing German socialist art in the 1950s. My discussion of the early development of East German art and, especially, of the varied relationships between the artists and the state, thus provides a foundation for interpreting recent attempts by Germans to assert a differentiated characterization of the art of the GDR beyond simple contrasts with western modernism or Soviet socialist realism. The production, exhibition,

and interpretation of art in the 1950s resonates unmistakably with the contemporary German situation. It is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to a more sensitive critical investigation of the multiple histories that determine the contours of Germany today.

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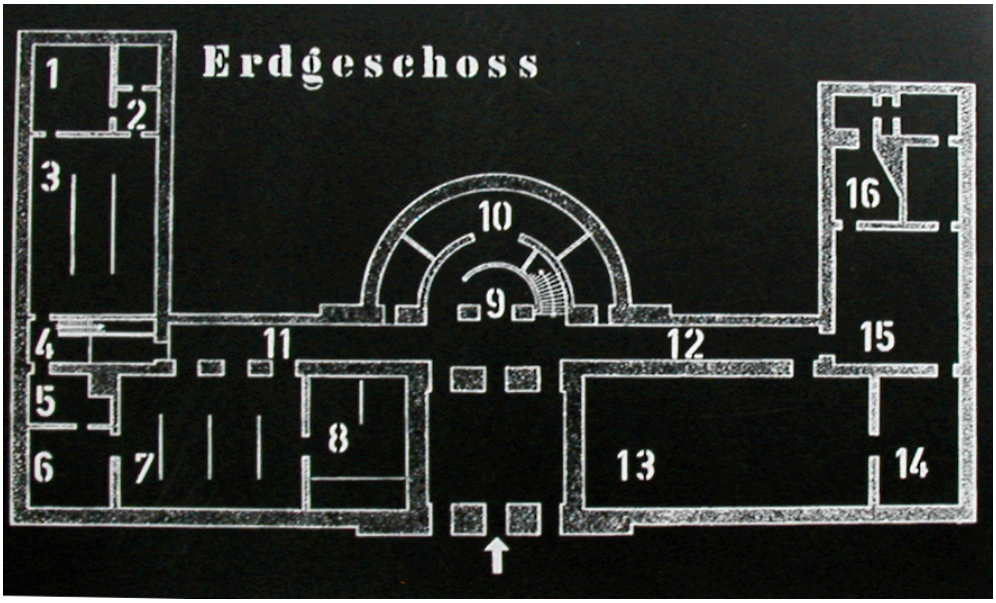
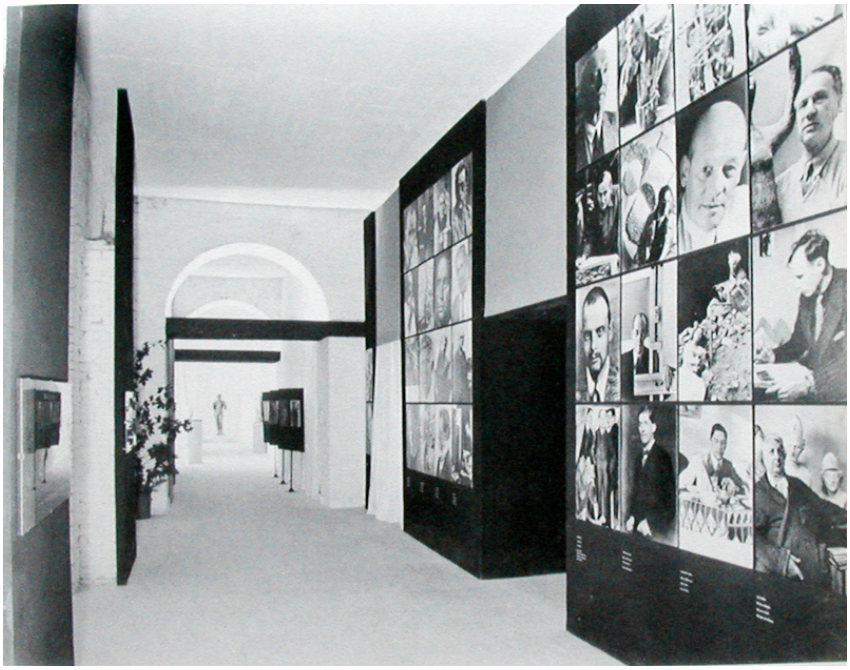


Fig. 1. 4. Foyer of the Fridericianum, Kassel, *documenta*, 1955.

Fig. 1. 5. Photomontage, foyer, Fridericianum, Kassel, *documenta*, 1955.



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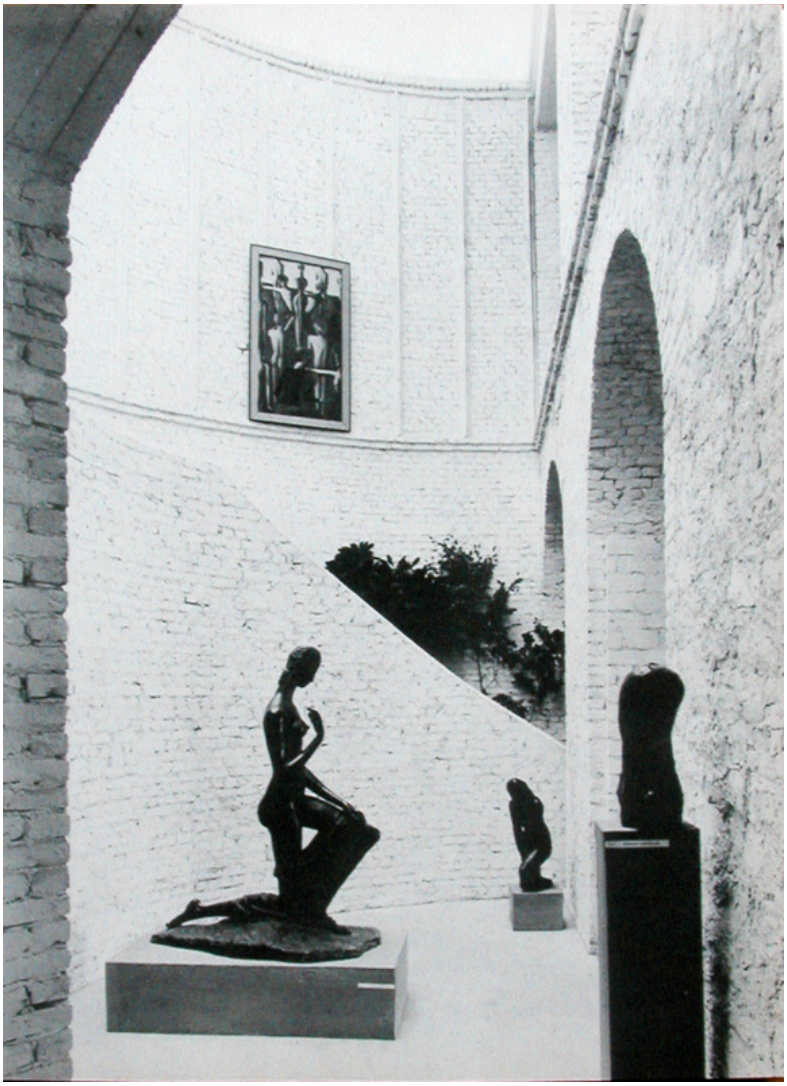

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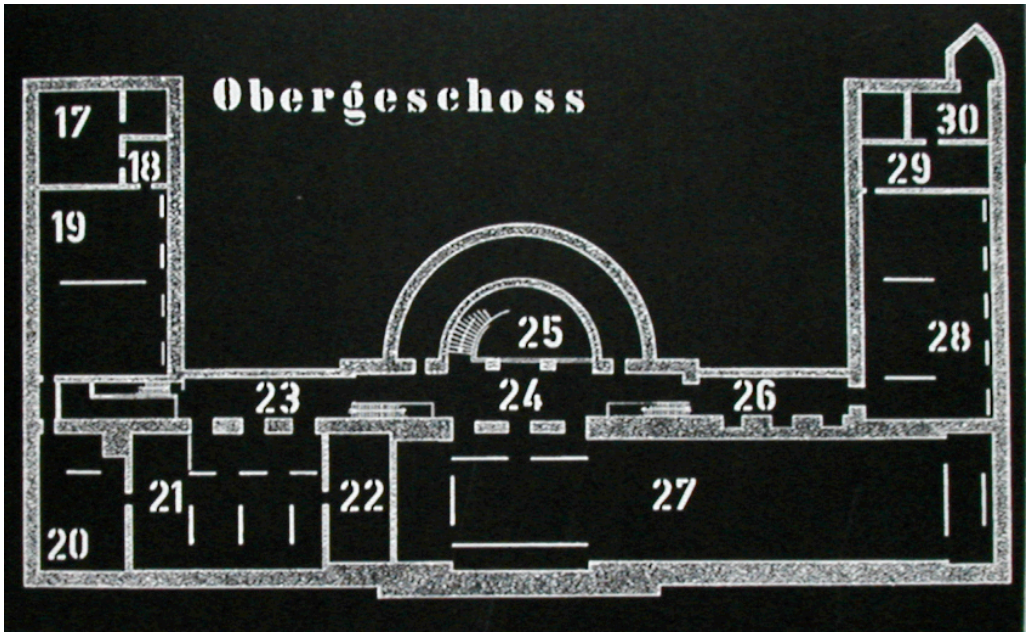

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Fig. 1. 17. View into Expressionist gallery, *documenta*, 1955.

Fig. 1. 18. Installation of works by Karl Hofer, *documenta*, 1955.

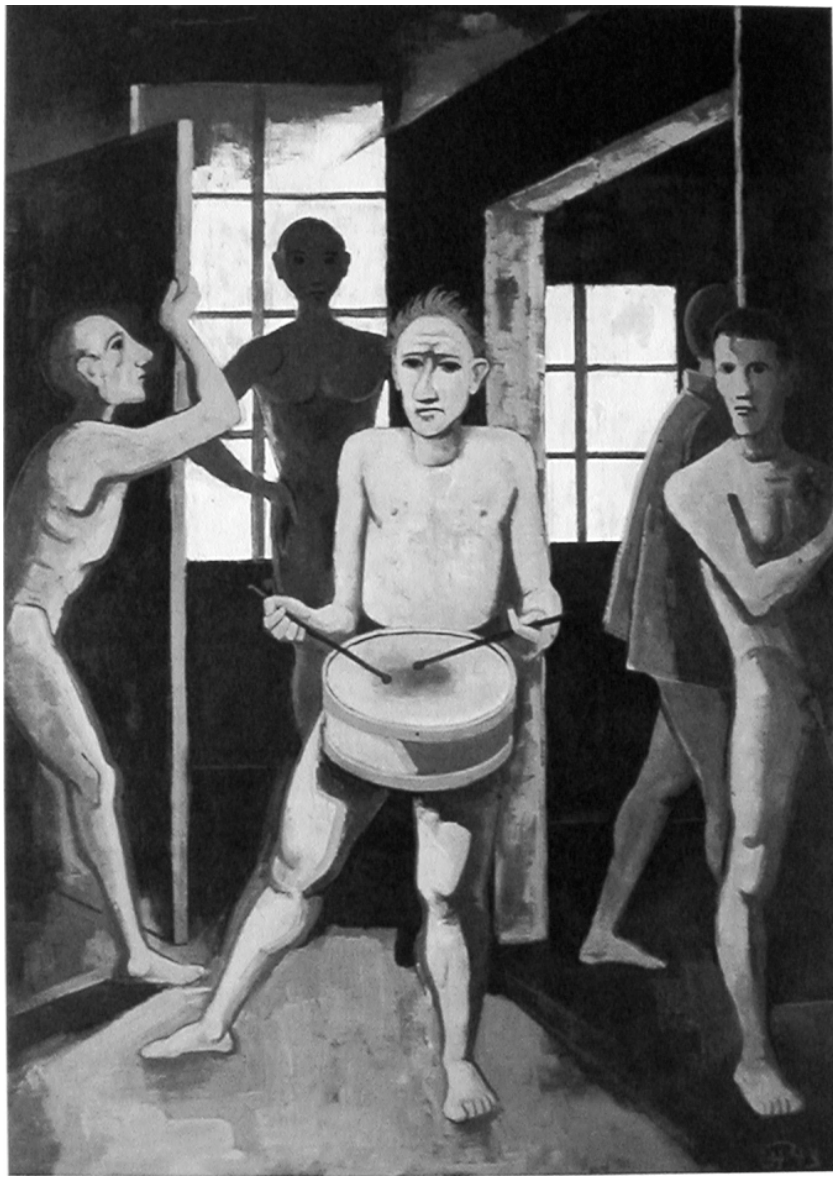


Fig. 1. 19. Karl Hofer, *Die schwarzen Zimmer*, 1943.

Fig. 1. 20. Installation of works by Wols, *documenta*, 1955.

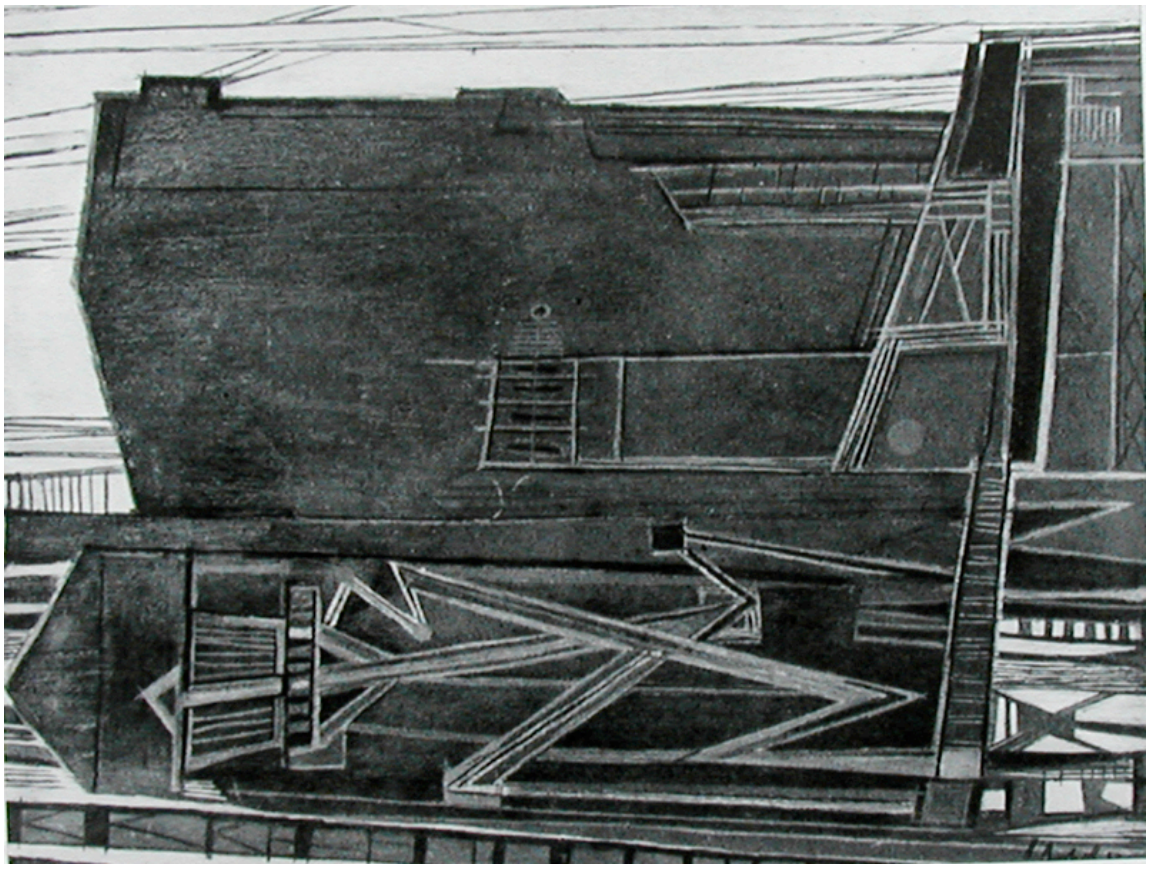
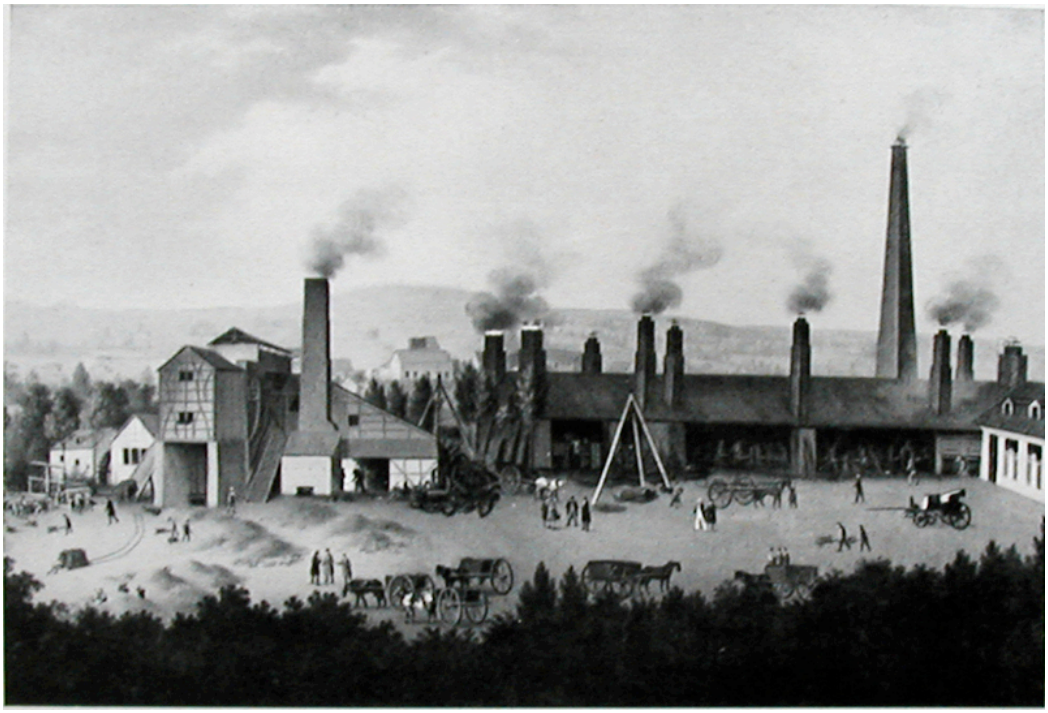


Fig. 2.1. Helmut J. Bischoff, *Lokomotive*, 1952.

Fig. 2.2. Anonymous (Netherlandish), ca. 1550.

Fig. 2.3. Cornelis Schut, *The Forge of Vulcan*, between 1597-1655.



2.4. Carl Schütz, *Eisenwalzwerk in Lendersdorf*, 1835.

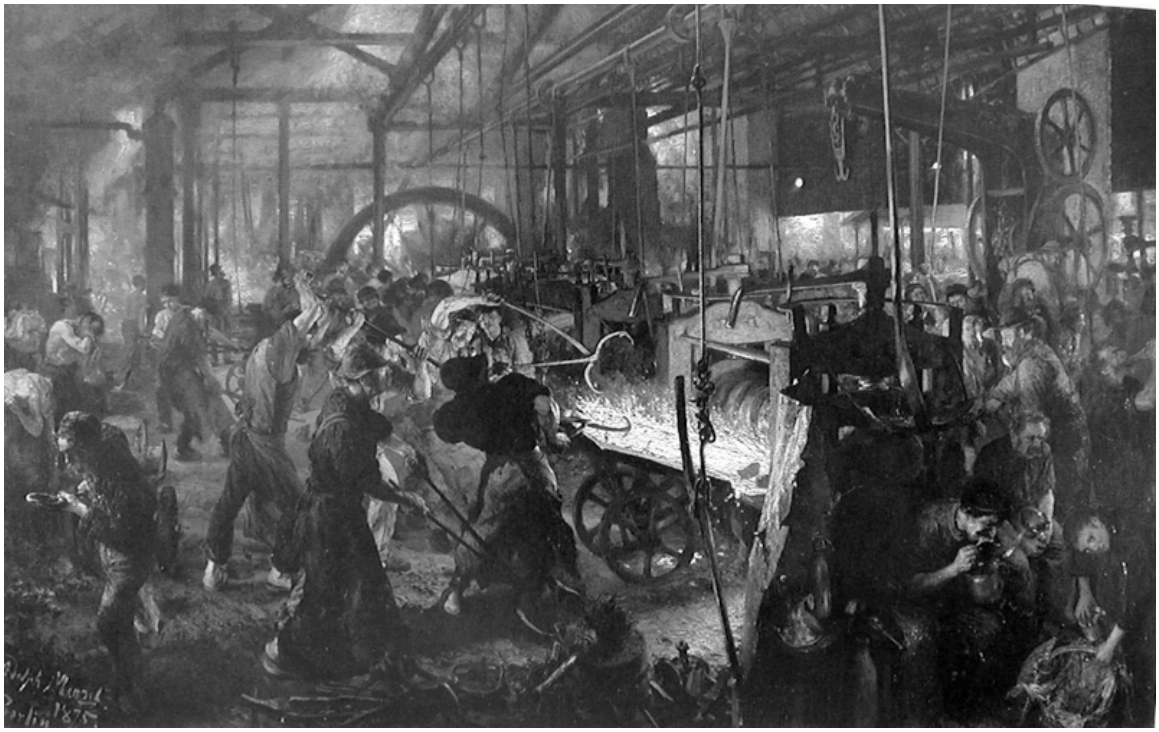


Fig. 2.5. Adolph von Menzel, *Das Eisenwalzwerk (Moderne Cyklopen)*, 1875.

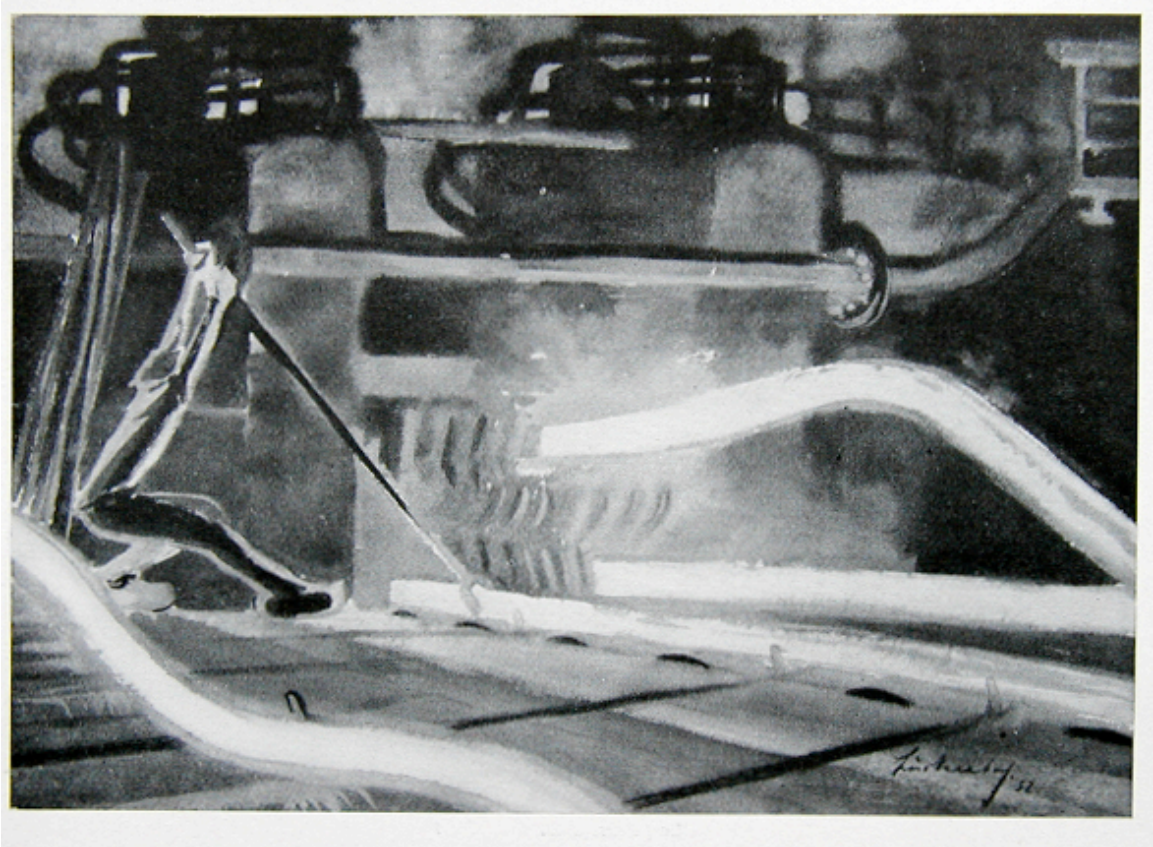


Fig. 2.6. Heinz Luckenbach, *Knüppelstraße*, 1952.

Fig. 2.7. Hans-Wolfgang Schulz, *Grünes Strahlen*, ca. 1952.

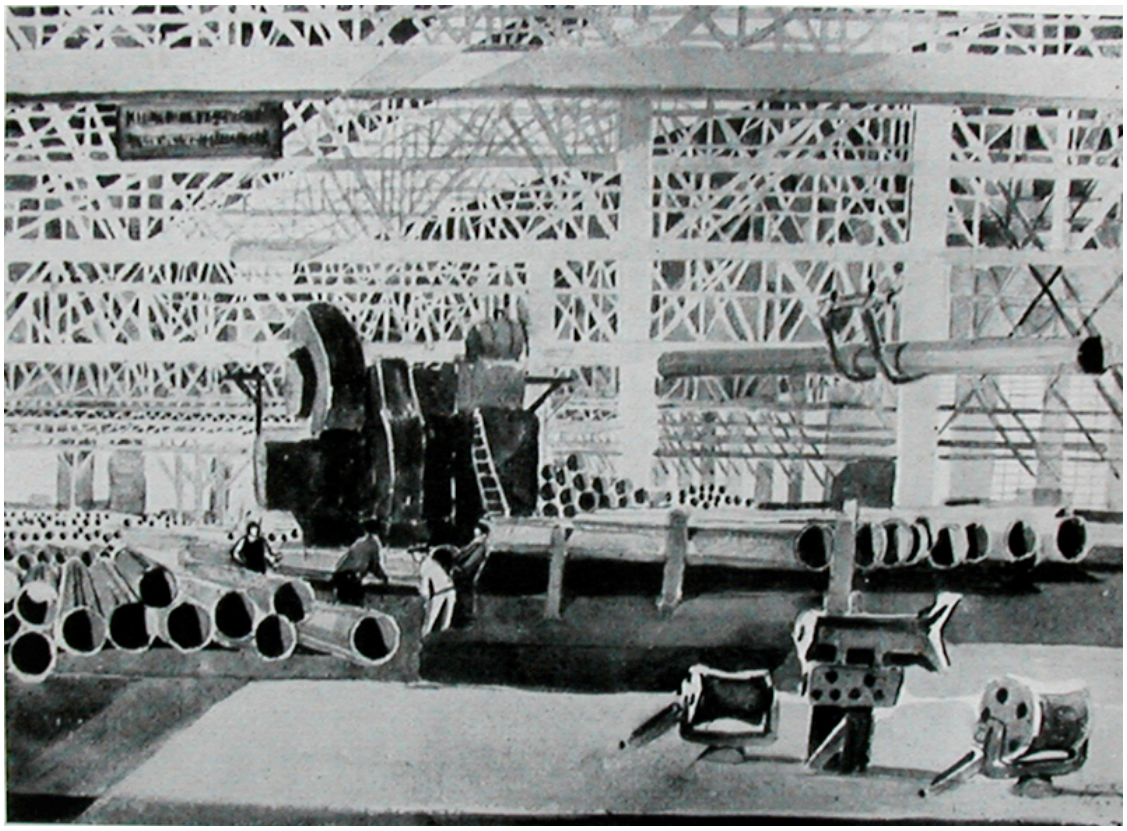


Fig. 2.8. Hermann Ratjen, *Im Röhrenwerk*, ca. 1952.

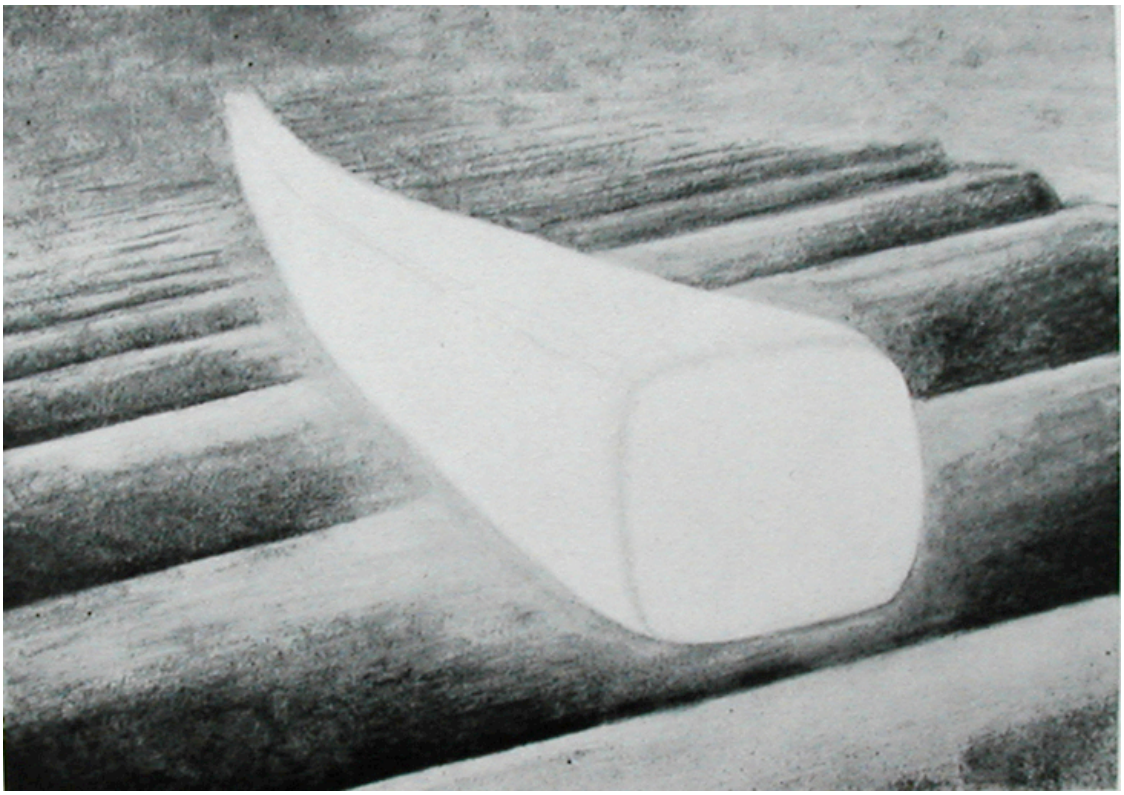


Fig. 2.9. Brigitte Meier-Denninghoff, *Die Walzstraße*, ca. 1952.

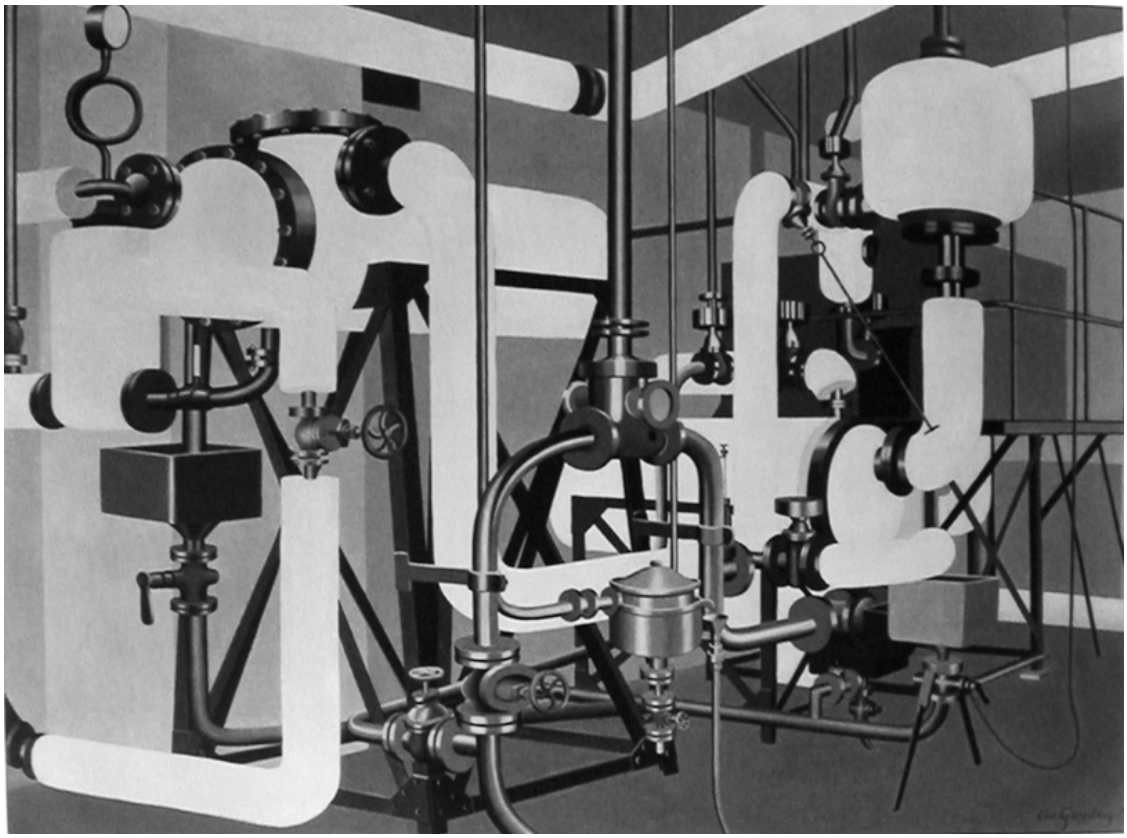


Fig. 2.10. Carl Grossberg, *Weiße Röhren*, 1933.

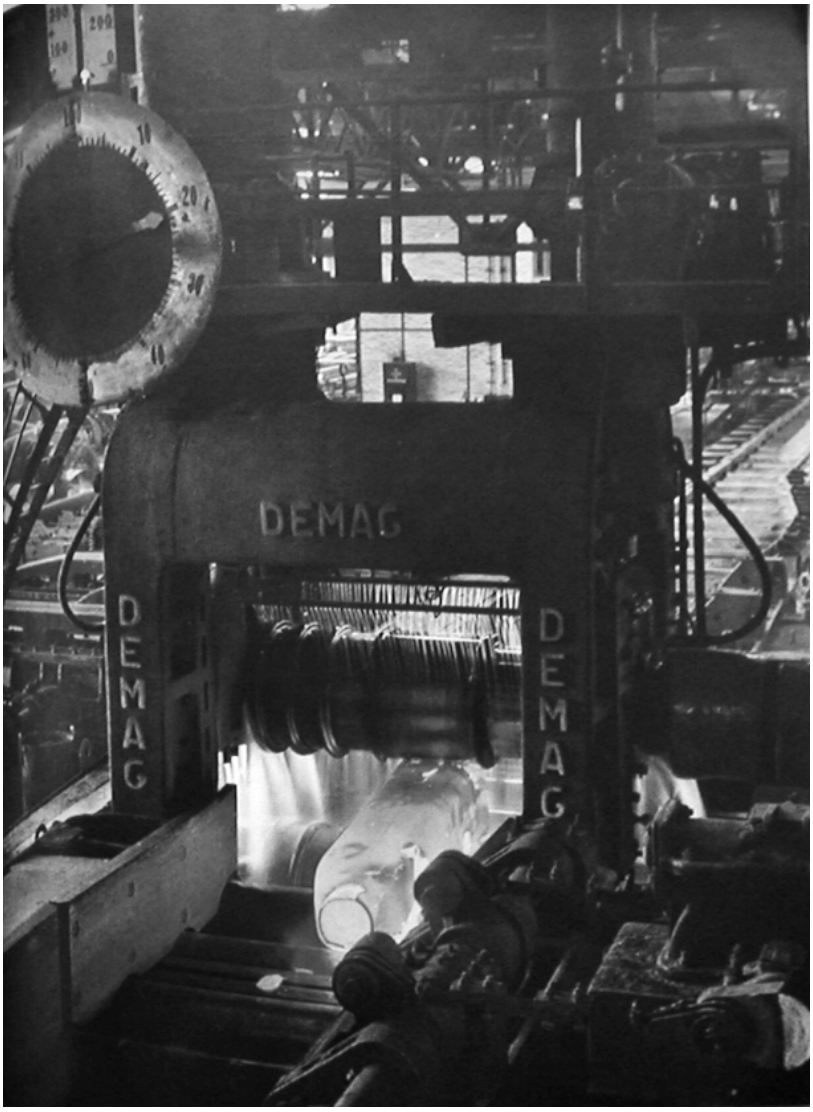


Fig. 2.11. Demag Corporation, advertisement in *Eisen und Stahl* exhibition catalog, 1952.

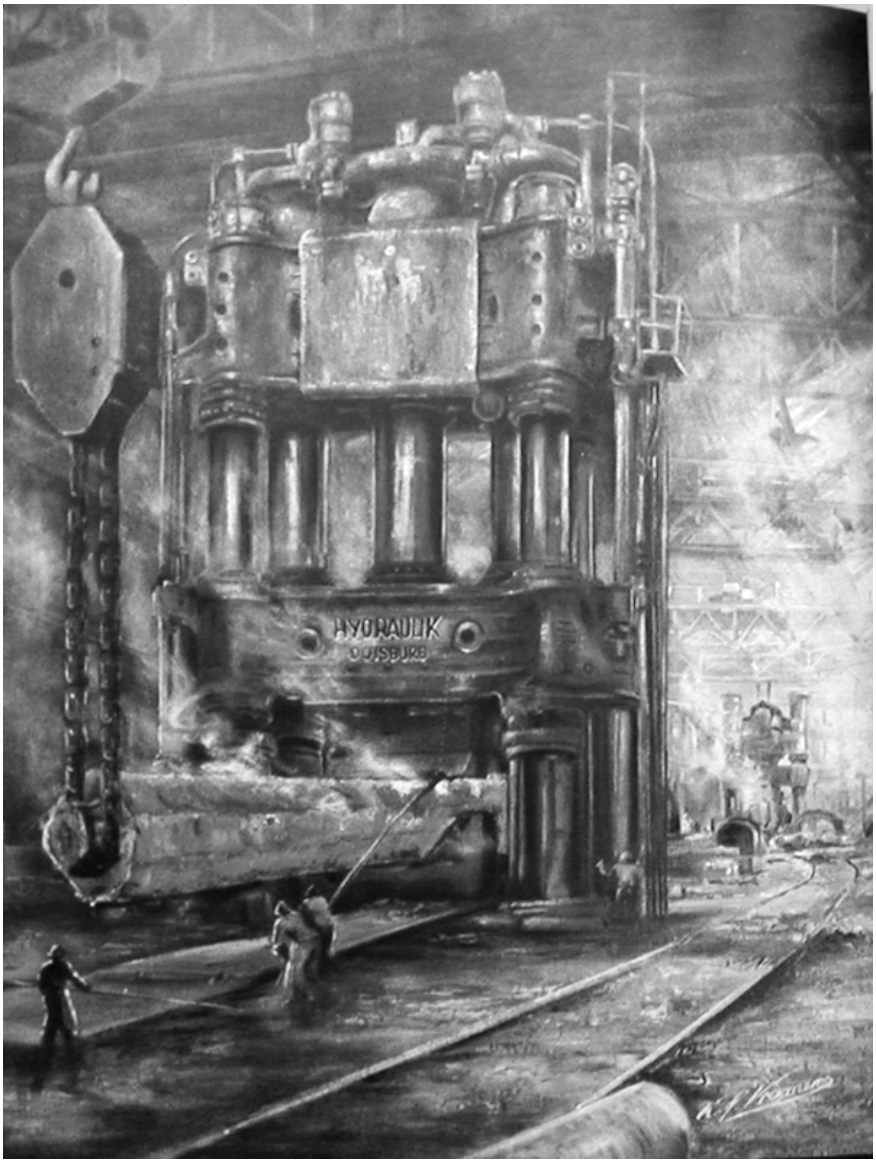


Fig. 2.12. Hydraulik Corporation of Duisburg, advertisement in Eisen und Stahl exhibition catalog, 1952, with painting by W. Kramer.

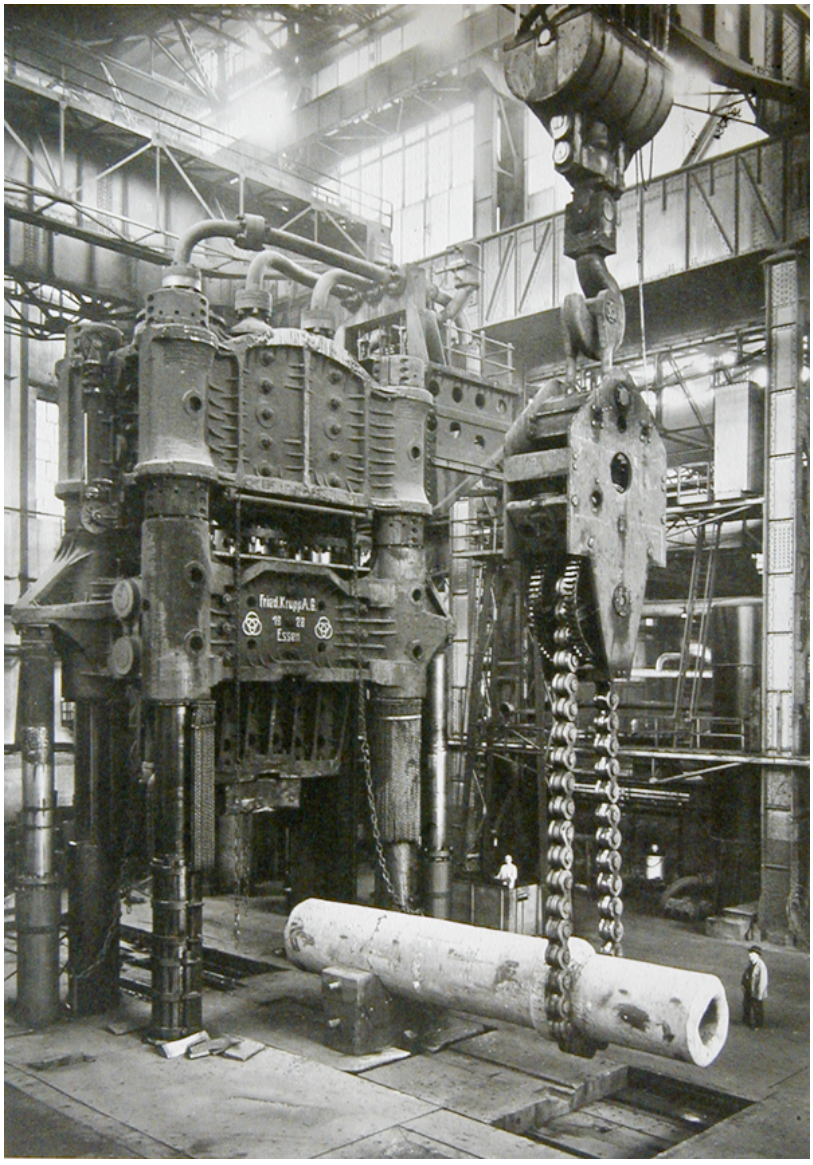


Fig. 2.13, Anonymous photograph of a Krupp plant in Essen, 1929.

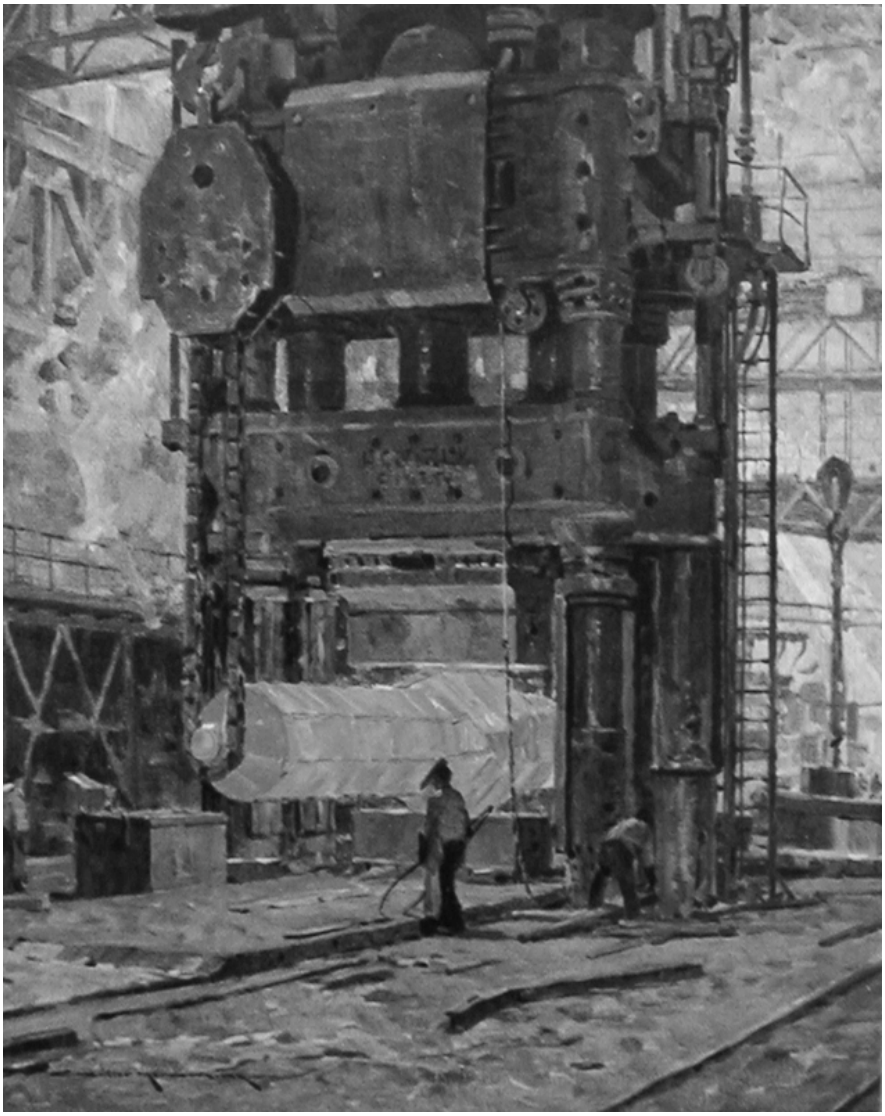


Fig. 2.14. Ruhrstahl Aktiengesellschaft, advertisement in *Eisen und Stahl* exhibition catalog, 1952, with Walter Hemming, *Schwere Presse in Hattingen.*

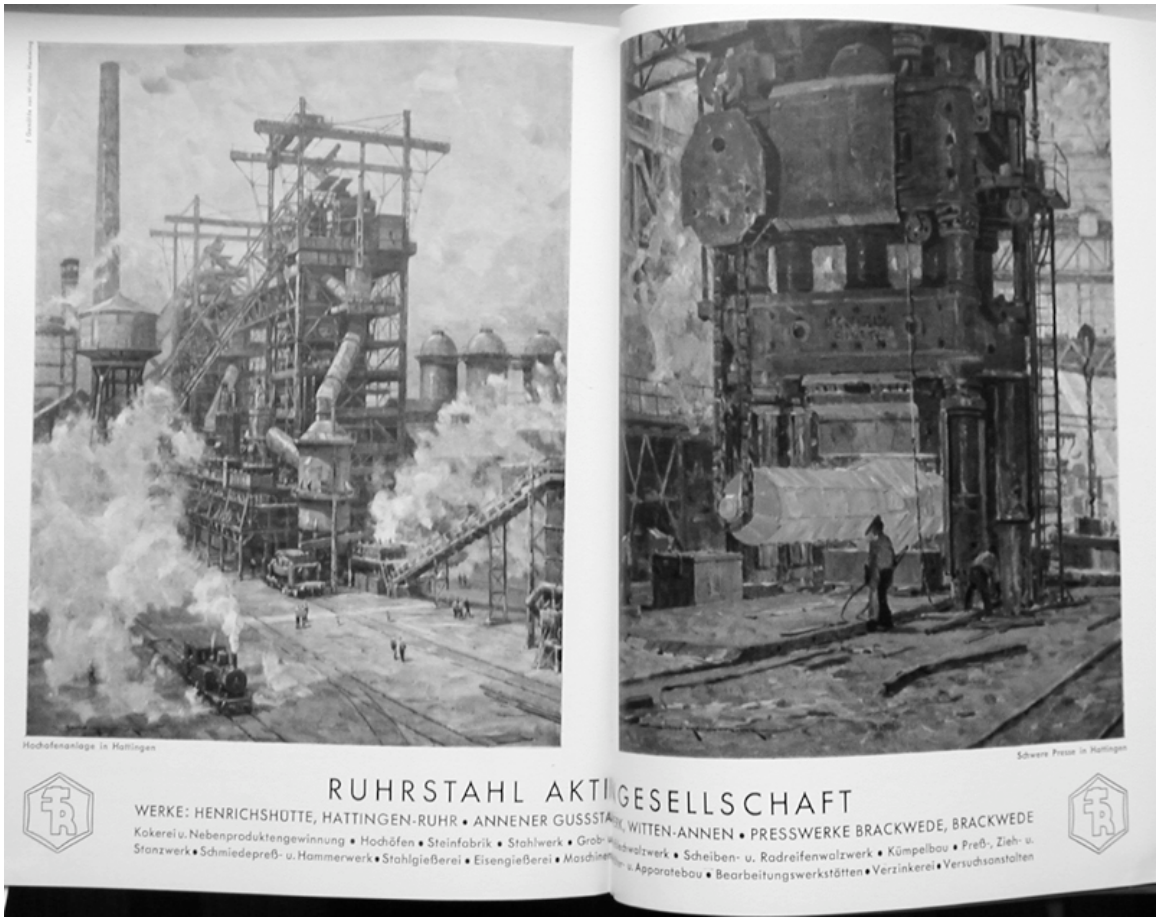


Fig. 2.15. Ruhrstahl Aktiengesellschaft, advertisement in Eisen und Stahl exhibition catalog, 1952.

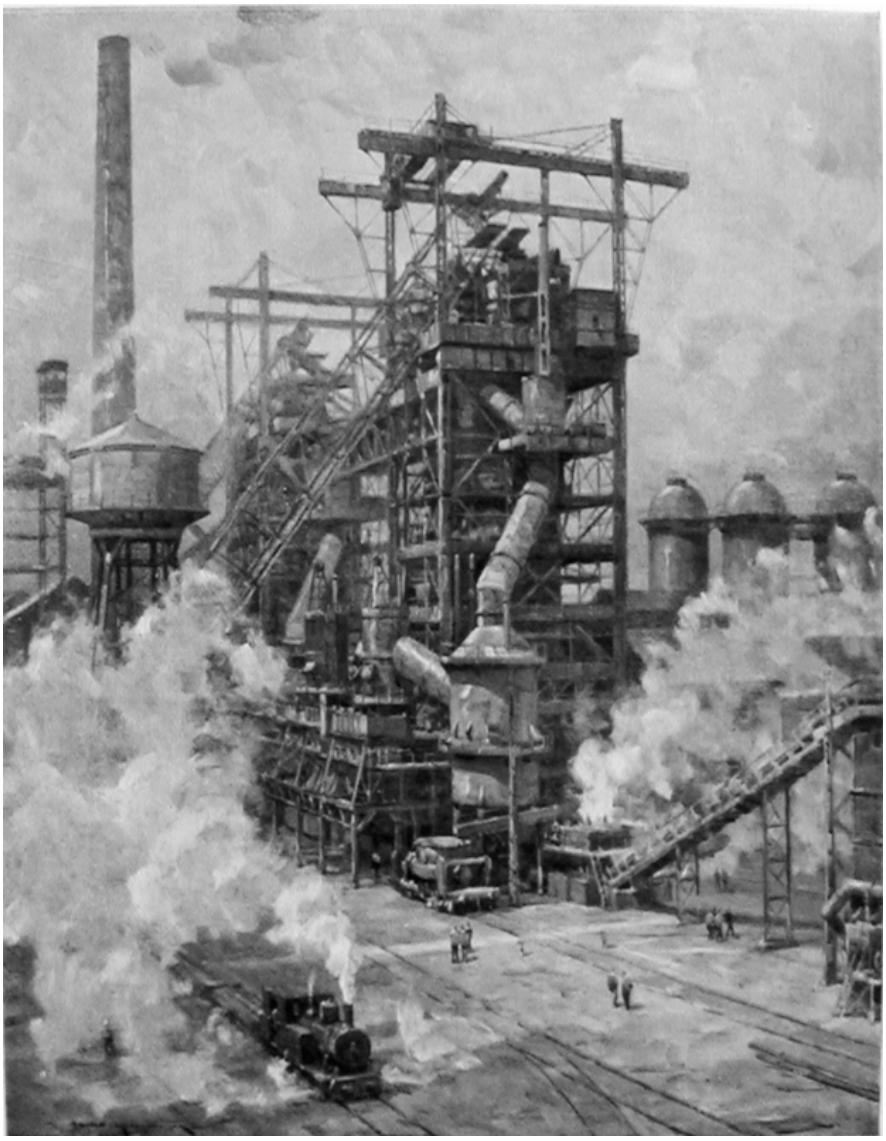


Fig. 2.16. Ruhrstahl Aktiengesellschaft, advertisement in *Eisen und Stahl* exhibition catalog, 1952, with Walter Hemming, *Hochofenanlage in Hattingen.*

Fig. 2.17. Rheinische Kalksteinwerke Wulfrath, advertisement in *Eisen und Stahl* exhibition catalog, 1952.

Fig. 2.18. Hüttenwerk Oberhausen AG, advertisement in *Eisen und Stahl* exhibition catalog, 1952, with Heinz Weber, *Industrielandschaft bei Oberhausen.*

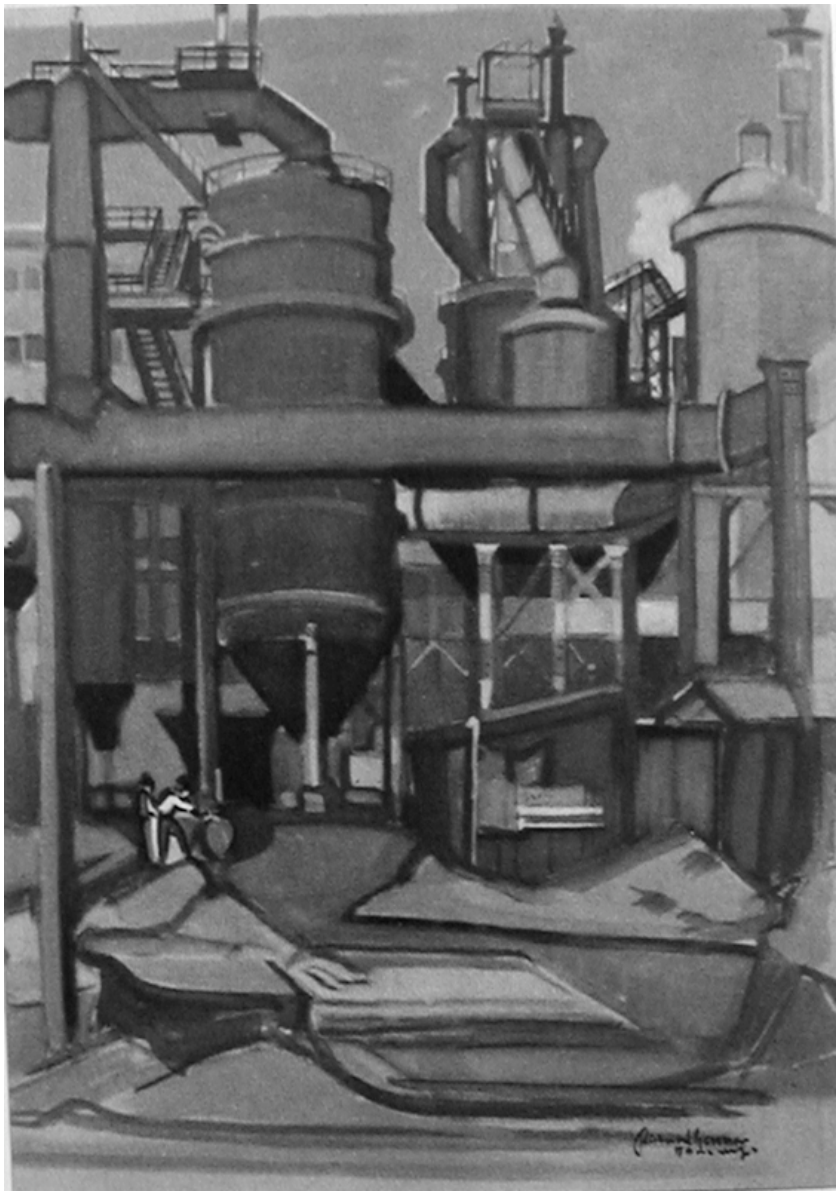


Fig. 2.19. Mannesmann Corporation, advertisement in Eisen und Stahl exhibition catalog, 1952, with sketch by Richard Gessner.

Fig. 2.20. Mannesmann Corporation, advertisement in Eisen und Stahl exhibition catalog, 1952, with sketch by Sven Anker Lindström.

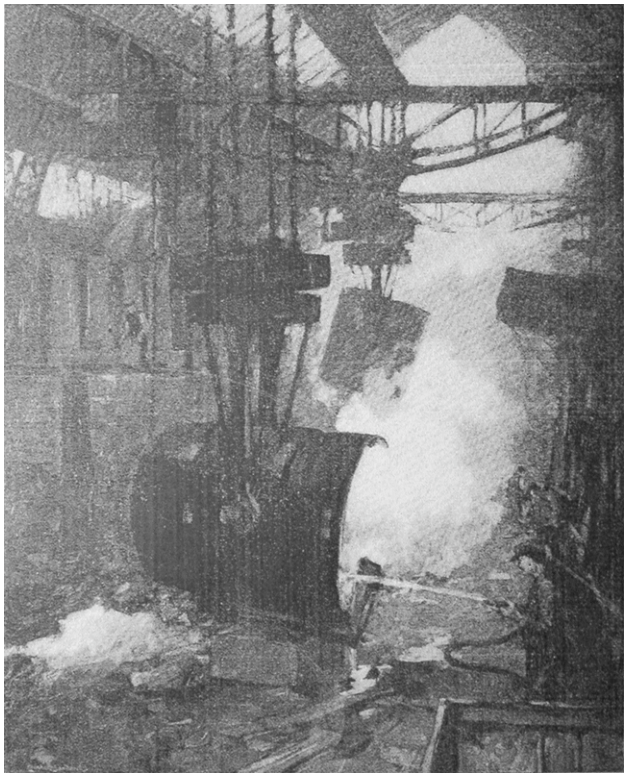


Fig. 2.21. Leonhard Sandrock, *Ausspritzen einer Gießpfanne*, 1940.

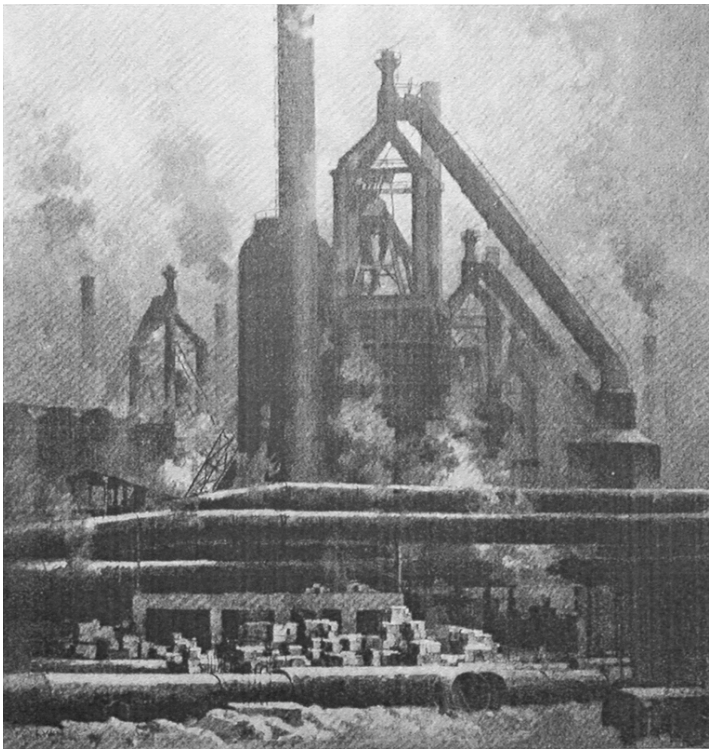


Fig. 2.22. Franz Gerwin, *Hochöfen im Bau*, 1940.

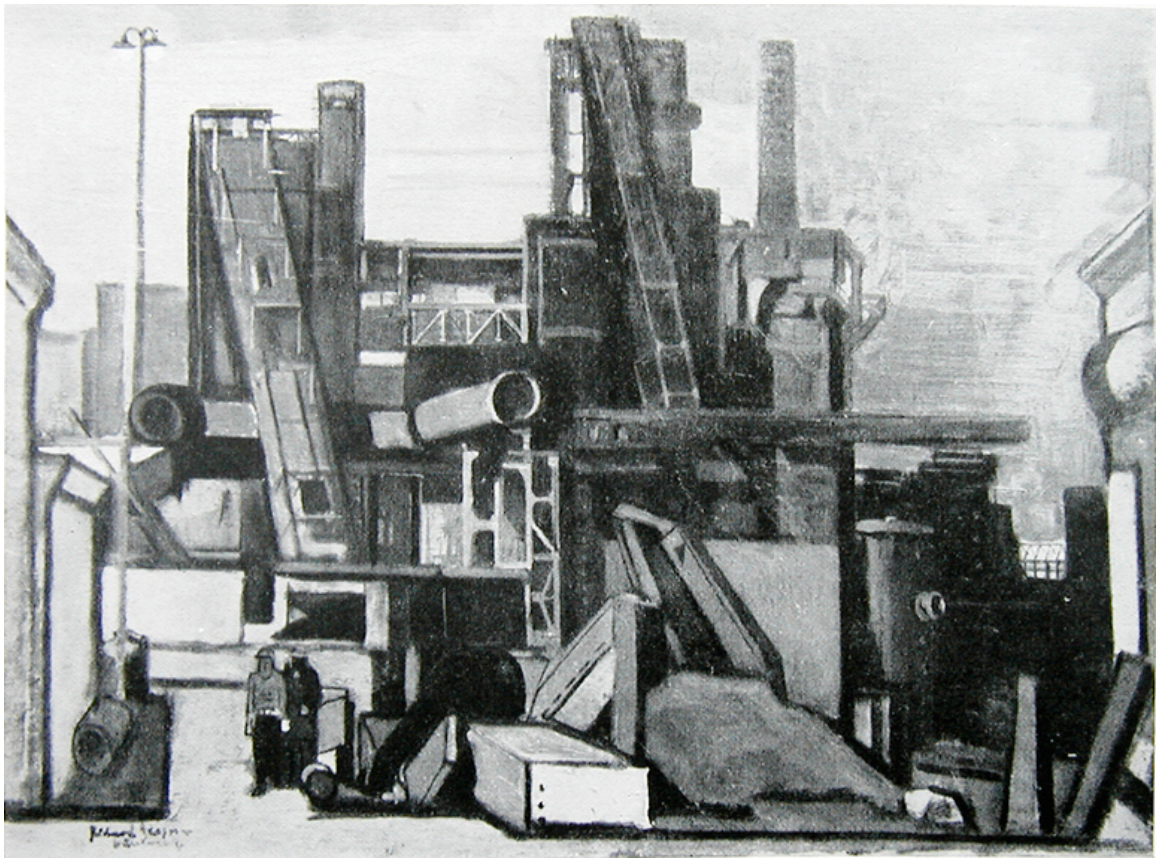


Fig. 2.23. Richard Gessner, *Demontiert*, ca. 1952.

Fig. 3.1. Werner Ruhner, *Achter Mai, 1945*, 1953.

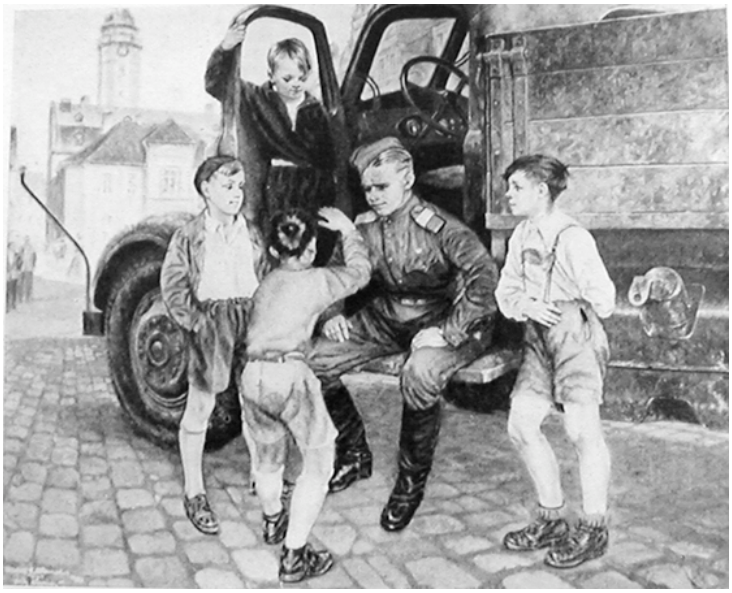


Fig. 3.2. Rudolf and Fritz Werner, *Freundschaft*, 1953.

Fig. 3.3. Karl Kuhn, *Ski Reparatur*, 1953.

Fig. 3.4. Karl Hofer, *Im Neubau*, 1947.

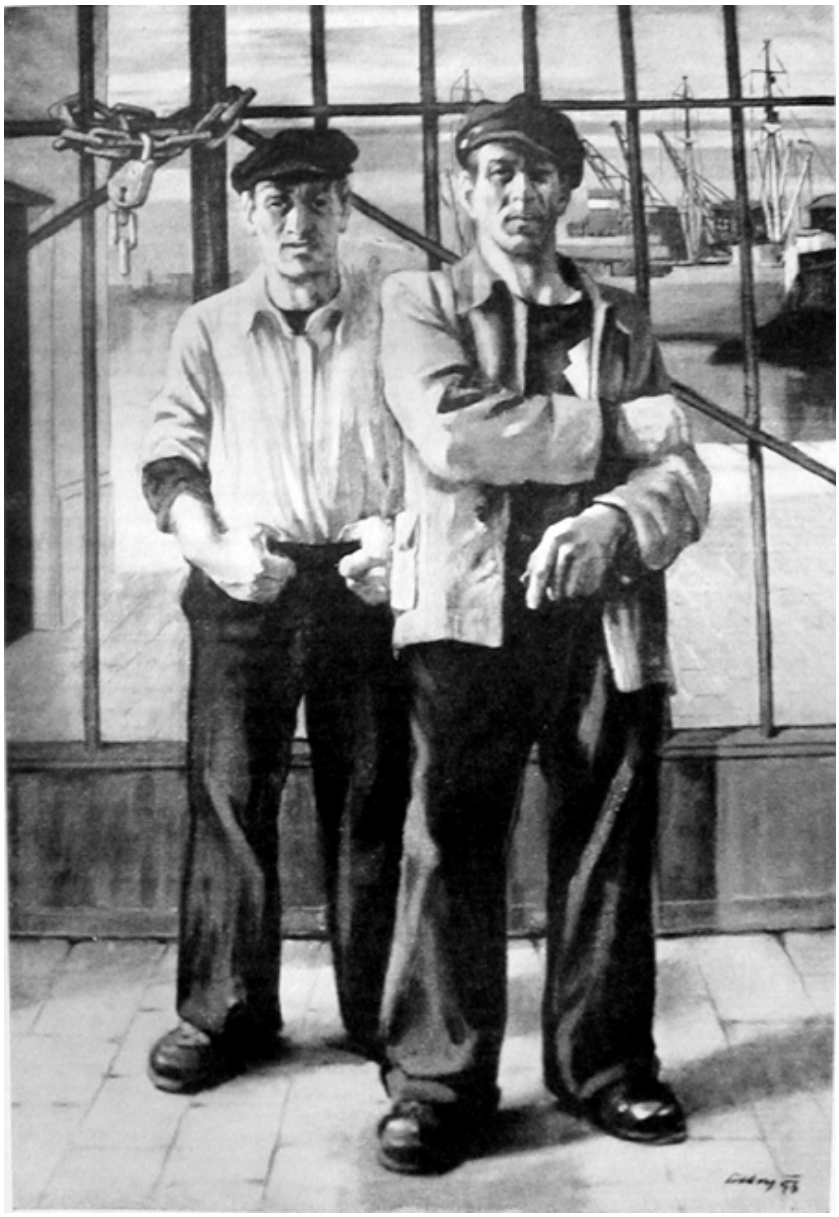


Fig. 3.5. Willy Colberg, *Streikposten in Hamburg*, 1953.

Fig. 3.6. Hanns Kralik, *Philipp-Müller-Aufgebot*, 1953.

Fig. 3.7. Werner Laux, *Dem Patrioten Philipp Müller*, 1953.

Fig. 3.8. Gernot Battesch, *Der 15. August 1951 in West-Berlin*, 1953.

Fig. 3.9. Erich Hering, *Nationalpreisträger Erich Wirth mit seinem Kollektiv*, 1953.

Fig. 3.10. Gerhard Kurt Müller, *Bildnis eines Offiziers der Volkspolizei*, 1953.

Fig. 4.1. Günther Becker, Orangerie, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.2. Günther Becker, painting installation, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.3. Günther Becker, sculpture installation, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.4. Günther Becker, painting installation, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.5. Günther Becker, installation of Philip Guston, *The Painter's City*, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.6. Günther Becker, painting installation, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.7. Günther Becker, installation of E. W. Nay, *Freiburger Bild*, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.8. Günther Becker, installation of works by Matta and Hartung, *II. documenta*, 1959.

Fig. 4.9. Wols, *Das Blaue Gespenst*, 1951.

Fig. 4.10. Friederich Werthmann, *Struktur Francesca*, 1959.

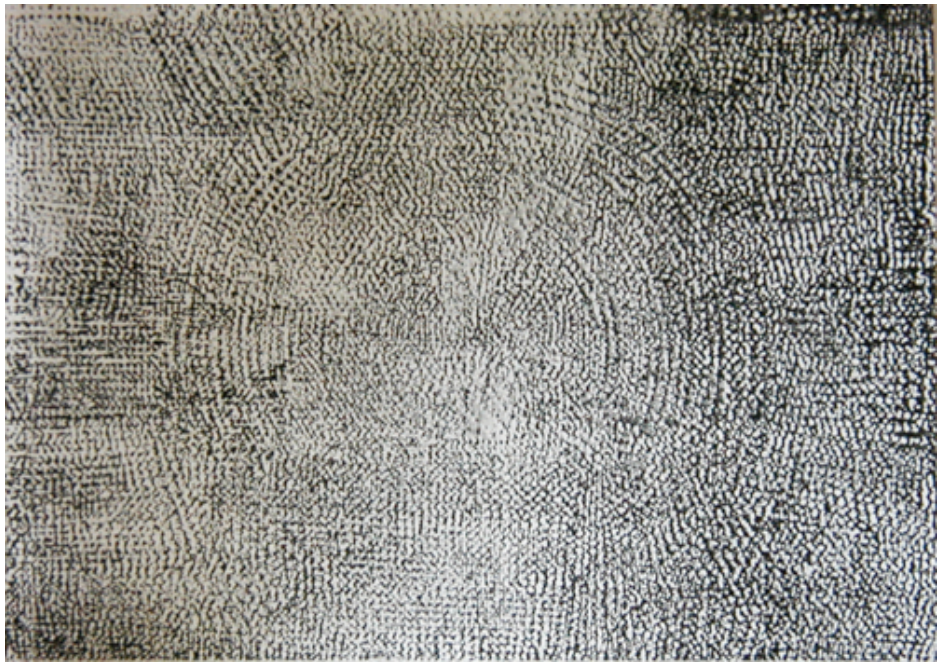


Fig. 4.11. Otto Piene, Bronze and Gold, 1959.

Fig. 4.12. Heimrad Prem, *Steinläuse*, 1959.

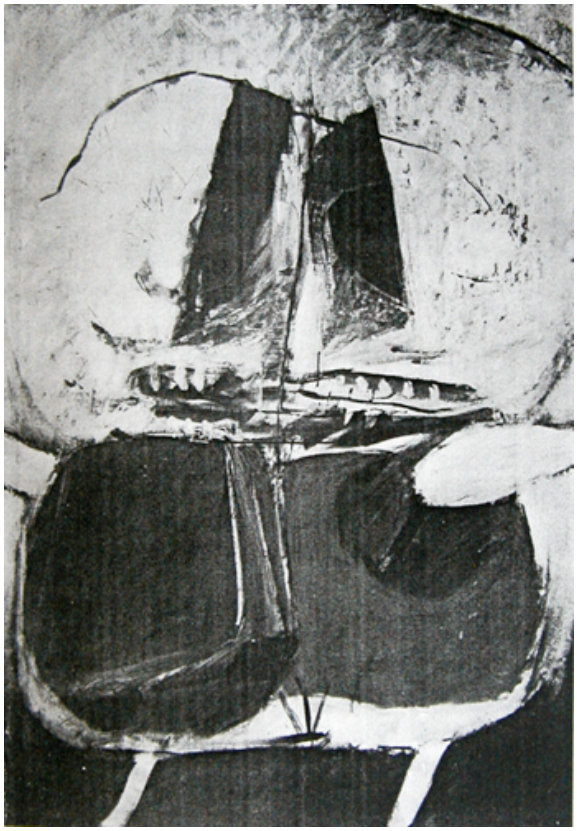


Fig. 4.13. Horst Antes, Bildnis, 1959.

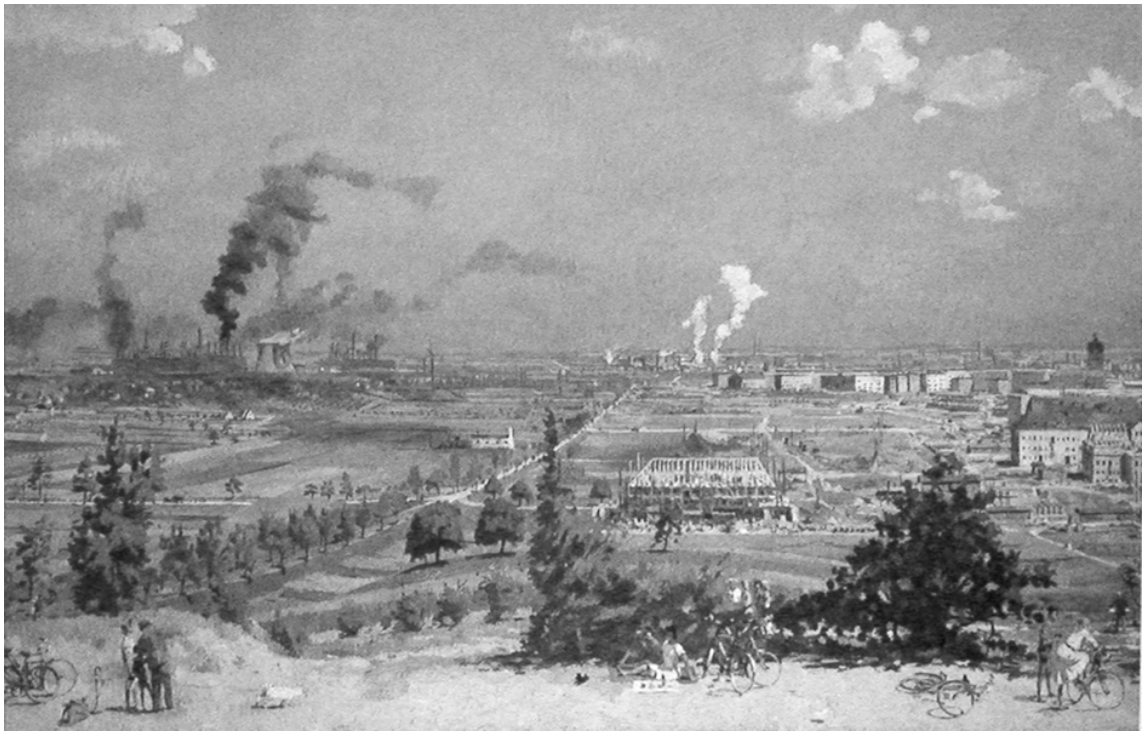


Fig. 4.14. Bernhard Kretzschmar, *Blick auf Stalinstadt*, 1955.

Fig. 4.15. Walter Womacka, *Rast Während der Ernte*, 1958.

Fig. 4.16. Karl-Heinz Wenzel, *Moderne Rübenpflege*, 1958.

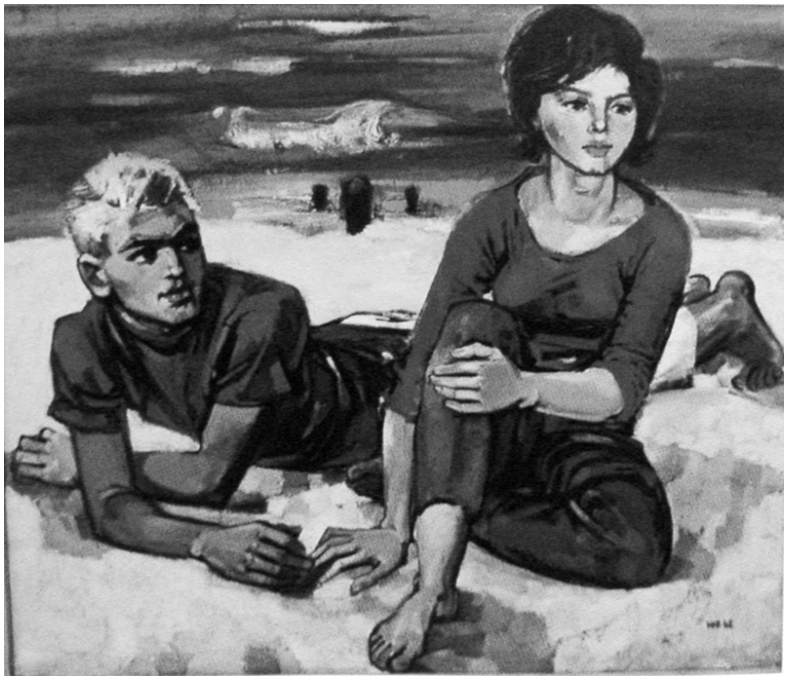


Fig. 4.17. Walter Womacka, *Paar am Strand*, 1962.

Fig. 4.18. Heinrich Witz, *Der neue Anfang*, 1958.

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Vita

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